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ELIZABETH v MARY

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“Sibling relationships can often be fraught, but when religious divides, succession disputes and capricious fathers are added to the mix, it's no wonder when they fall apart. This was the backdrop to the young lives of **Mary and Elizabeth**, who would both come to rule England, but suffer a great deal of heartbreak along the way. In Nicola Tallis's cover feature (page 20), she shows how their personal feuds shaped the course of Tudor England.

Elizabeth went on to become one of England's greatest queens, but did she spend her reign harbouring an astonishing secret? That's the contention of people who believe in the tale of the Bisley Boy, whereby the young princess died in childhood and was replaced by a small boy of similar appearance who would masquerade as Elizabeth for the rest of her life. This curious story is one of the subjects I explore in my article on **conspiracy theories** on page 46. From the legends of the Knights Templar to the assassination of JFK, what is it that makes people so keen to believe in alternative versions of the past?

There are few bigger fans of historical conspiracy theories than film-makers – Oliver Stone's *JFK* being perhaps the best-known example. But cinema plays with history in other ways, too, as Robert Bartlett reveals in his article on page 38. Focusing on a **century of medieval film**, he examines how the likes of *Braveheart* and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* have reimagined the Middle Ages for the masses.

Rob Attar

Editor



THREE THINGS I'VE LEARNED THIS MONTH

1. Mute witnesses

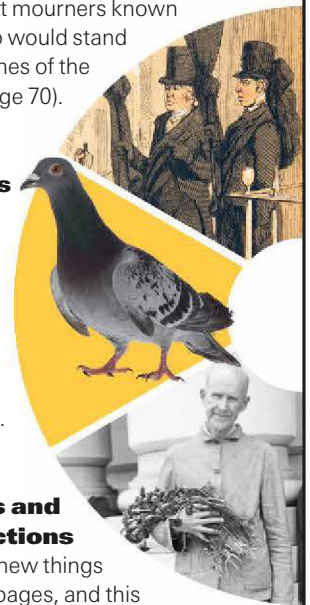
In our interview with Judith Flanders on Victorian death, I was interested to find out about the silent mourners known as mutes who would stand outside the homes of the deceased (page 70).

2. Bird feeders

David Musgrove's article on wheelbarrow racing highlighted some other unusual crazes, notably a 1901 Yorkshire competition where a group of men attempted to eat a pigeon every single day (page 31).

3. Elections and corrections

I always learn new things from our Q&A pages, and this month I was intrigued by the story of Eugene V Debs, who ran for the US presidency in 1920, despite being behind bars (page 45).



THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS



David Musgrove

"Wheelbarrows do not drive many people crazy, but they grabbed the headlines in 1886. It's one of the odder stories I've researched but it's one that shines a light on the media's role in whipping up a public frenzy." **David investigates the wheelbarrow craze that swept 1880s Britain on page 30**



Judith Flanders

"Being a historian of daily life is fun. But life involves death, and turning away was not going to make the subject disappear. So it was time death found its place in my research, right beside life." **Judith discusses her new book on death in Victorian Britain on page 68**



Islam Issa

"A unique city whose origins stem from the power of vision, Alexandria has always been an important part of me. Its millennia-long tale uncovers a rich and gripping story of a city that changed the world." **Islam reveals how Alexandria grew into the world's first global city on page 58**



Nicola Tallis

"Mary I and Elizabeth I are the most famous sisters in Tudor history, but we often think of them as individuals. It has been fascinating to delve into the twists and turns of the siblings' relationship, for ultimately their fates were inextricably linked." **Nicola examines the bond between Henry VIII's daughters on page 20**

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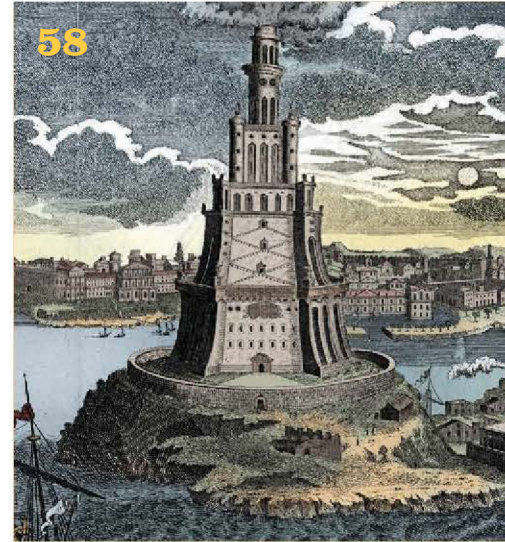
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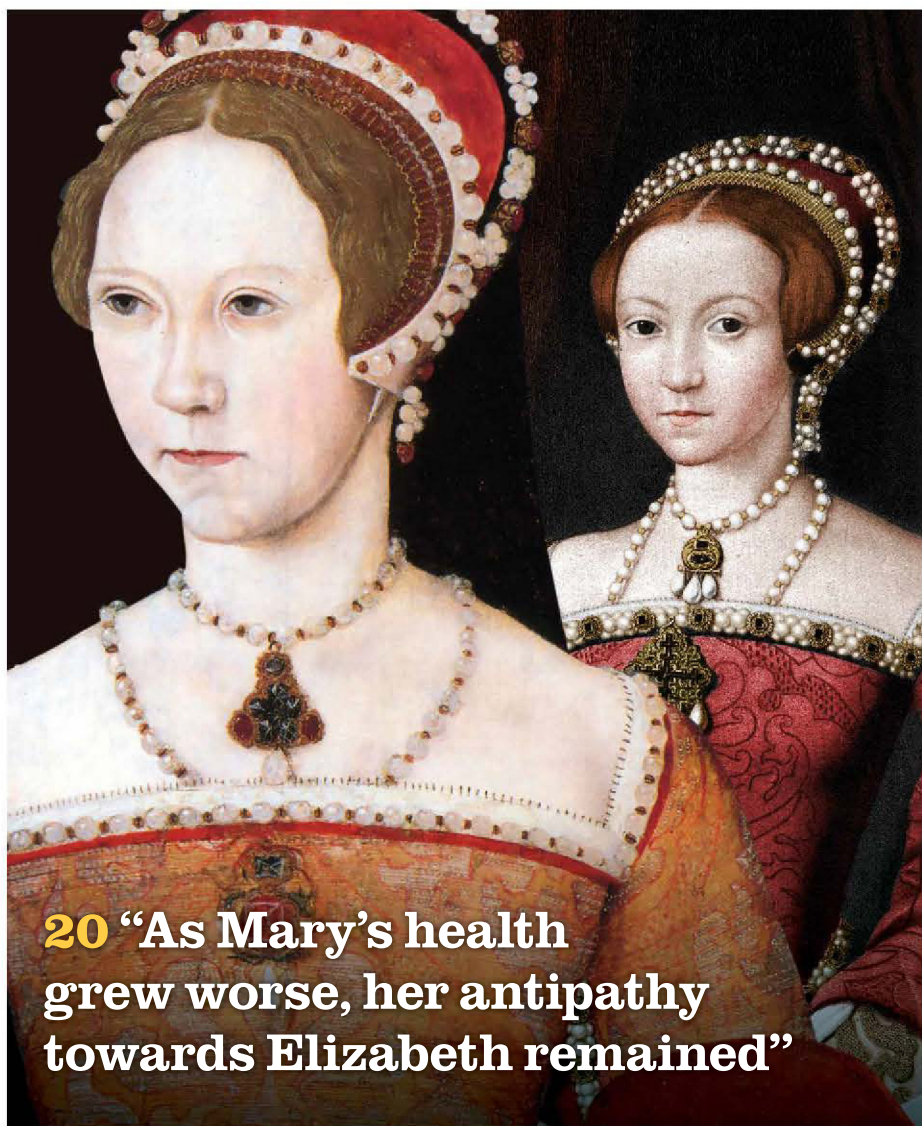
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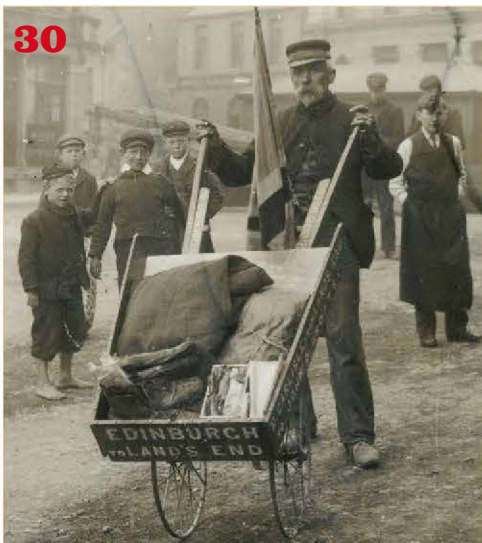
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20 “As Mary’s health grew worse, her antipathy towards Elizabeth remained”



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ANNIVERSARIES

DANNY BIRD highlights events that took place in March in history

13 MARCH 1781

William Herschel discovers Uranus

The polymath spies the seventh planet from the sun

On the night of 13 March 1781, William Herschel ventured into his garden at 19 New King Street in Bath, Somerset, and peered through his 6.2-inch reflecting telescope. It was a regular ritual for the composer and self-taught astronomer, but this time he noticed something different. There, in the night sky, was a strange object that he had never seen before, which he believed to be "either [a] nebulous star or perhaps a comet".

Unbeknownst to Herschel, the object had been sighted before: in 1690, England's first astronomer royal, John Flamsteed, had catalogued the hazy glow as the star '34 Tauri' during his own observations. But believing his find to be unique, Herschel immediately set about spreading news of his discovery, and became ever more convinced of his comet theory when he noticed that the object appeared to move in relation to the surrounding stars.

By 1783, however, Herschel had changed his mind: the object's lack of a characteristic tail, and the plotting of its orbit as near circular, rather than elliptical, suggested it wasn't a comet at all. In fact, the polymath realised that it was actually the solar system's seventh planet, and he named it *Georgium Sidus* ('George's Star') in honour of the monarch, George III. Nevertheless, it would later become better known as Uranus, after the Greek god who fathered the Titans.

Uranus, shown here in a 1980s image, was originally believed to be a star or a comet



TOP PHOTO/ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES



Queen Anne's vetoing of the Scottish Militia Bill is the last time a British monarch has withheld royal assent



11 MARCH 1708

Queen Anne refuses to give the Scottish Militia Bill her royal assent after the discovery of a French invasion fleet bound for Scotland. The bill, detailing plans for the raising of a Scottish army, is vetoed over fears that such a militia's loyalty could be in question.

29 MARCH 1974

The Terracotta Army is unearthed

An incredible discovery is made in the Chinese countryside

Towards the end of March 1974, a group of farmers descended upon a field in the Chinese province of Shaanxi, about 20 miles from the city of Xi'an. Frustrated by droughts and knowing that the area boasted subterranean springs, the men began to clear the soil and build a much-needed well. About a metre down, however, they made a startling discovery: nestled in the ground before them were several broken pottery fragments. Intrigued, the men kept digging, and before long a series of sculpted terracotta body parts and bronze arrowheads began to emerge. Although the farmers weren't exactly sure what they had discovered, they decided to alert the local authorities.

A few weeks later, the news reached an archaeologist named Zhao Kangmin, who cycled to the site in a state of giddy excitement. Twelve years earlier, he had excavated three life-sized statues of crossbowmen in the same vicinity, and knew that the farmers had likely stumbled across artefacts of a similar nature – even if he remained uncertain of their exact provenance. By the time Zhao arrived, more fragments had been unearthed, and he and his colleagues were able to assemble the pieces into a pair of earthenware warriors, both measuring 1.78 metres in height.

Initially, Zhao was worried the sculptures might be categorised as symbols of China's 'Four Olds', which were being destroyed by the ruling Communist Party. But he needn't have worried. When the news reached Beijing later that year, the government instead launched further excavations, eventually leading to the discovery of over 8,000 individual figures, each bearing unique facial features and weapons.

As Zhao suspected, it transpired that the so-called 'Terracotta Warriors' had formed part of a vast mausoleum complex built around the tomb of the emperor Qin Shi Huang (reigned 221–210 BC). Designed to protect the ruler in the afterlife, the sculptures are now regarded as being among the finest ancient funerary monuments in the world.



Just a small portion of the 8,000-plus warriors built to guard the tomb of the emperor Qin Shi Huang. The sculptures now form part of a Unesco World Heritage Site

Berlin suffrage campaigners mark the first International Women's Day in 1911. The event had initially been proposed by German women's rights activist Clara Zetkin



19 MARCH 1911

People in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland celebrate the first International Women's Day, several months after a resolution for such a day had been passed by the International Conference of Working Women.



3 MARCH 1613

Michael Romanov becomes tsar of all Russia

A reluctant teenager is placed on a troubled throne

At dawn on 3 March 1613, a teenage boy and his mother were accosted by a throng of Orthodox bishops and aristocrats outside the Ipatiev monastery in Kostroma, some 200 miles north-east of Moscow. The adolescent was only 16 years old, but he would have doubtlessly recognised some of the holy relics in the group's possession – not least the Feodorovskaya Icon of the Mother of God, which was sacred to his family. For this was no ordinary teenager, but the young noble Michael Fyodorovich Romanov, and the delegation was there to inform him that he was now tsar and grand prince of all Russia: news that immediately sent him into a deep shock.

The decision to appoint Romanov hadn't happened overnight, however. A few weeks earlier, representatives from across Russia's social classes had gathered in Moscow to

form a council known as the Zemsky Sobor ('assembly of the land') and set about solving the tsardom's myriad problems. These issues were themselves rooted in an even longer history of turmoil, beginning in 1598 when the reigning tsar, Fyodor I, had died without an heir. The throne had then passed to a series of short-lived rulers (including three imposters each pretending to be Fyodor's deceased half-brother, Dmitri), and by 1613, Russians were crying out for stability.

Yet it wasn't that simple. The Zemsky Sobor was dominated by the heads of Moscow's most noble families, known as the boyars, who each expressed different views about who should take the throne. Several members endorsed the Swedish prince Karl Filip, whose country occupied north-western Russia, while others proposed the Polish-Lithuanian prince Władysław. The Cossack

18 MARCH 1241

The Mongol empire inflicts a crushing blow on Polish armies at the battle of Chmielnik. The defeat causes panic across the Kingdom of Poland's western territories, with the residents of Kraków abandoning their city to the mercy of the rampaging enemy.



ILLUSTRATION BY CHERRY ELLIS

delegates, meanwhile, denounced the foreign candidates and proposed Romanov instead.

In the end, the boy won the Sobor's vote: his father, Fyodor, was respected among the clergy, and – as a relative of many of the boyars that attended the Sobor – his nomination seemed like the best choice. Better yet, his inexperience and the fact his father was currently imprisoned in Poland meant that he would also make an excellent puppet ruler, willing to bend to the boyars' wishes.

Romanov's initial refusal to accept the appointment was supported by his mother: the Russian throne was perilous, and she reminded the delegates that the last 15 years had seen multiple tsars betrayed by their courtiers. Nevertheless, the teen was crowned in the Kremlin four months later, founding a dynasty that would go on to rule Russia for the next 304 years.

AKG IMAGES



The first successful Concorde prototype – Concorde 001 – takes to the skies above Toulouse in 1969

2 MARCH 1969

Concorde makes its debut

The supersonic aeroplane soars into the history books

After six years of development and two abandoned test flights, Concorde 001 finally took to the skies above southern France on 2 March 1969. The successful take-off – witnessed by a crowd of engineers, technicians and more than 600 journalists – was accompanied by enthusiastic cheers and applause, although this was barely audible above the roar of the prototype jet's four Olympus 593 engines.

After 27 minutes in the air, the plane returned to the runway at Toulouse-Montaudran Airport, where its crew members were treated to a heroes' reception. Upon exiting the aircraft, pilot André Turcat gave a thumbs up and proclaimed: "Finally the big bird flies, and I can say now that it flies pretty well."

Founded in November 1962 as a joint initiative between the British Aircraft Corporation and French manufacturing firm Sud Aviation, the Concorde project had been established with the aim of creating the world's first supersonic passenger jet. Yet it wasn't until 1 October 1969, seven months after its maiden flight, that Concorde 001 demonstrated its extraordinary potential by breaking the sound barrier.

Many more test flights followed, and in 1976 the project reached its ultimate goal. On 21 January, the first Concorde jets entered commercial service, securing the aircraft's status as an icon of modern aviation. **H**

Danny Bird is staff writer on *BBC History Magazine*

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THE CONVERSATION



① Attendees at a Pride march in Chennai, India in June 2012 ② A float in New York City's Gay Pride Parade, 1989 ③ A portrait of 17th-century monarch Christina, Queen of Sweden, whose sexuality has sparked debate ④ A poster promoting ACT UP, an Aids campaigning organisation, New York, 1989



LGBTQ HISTORY

Campaigner. Iconoclast. Absent friend. LGBTQ people who changed the world

February sees the UK celebrate the contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people throughout history. To mark the occasion, **MATT ELTON** asked a panel of experts to each nominate an individual they believe deserves to be more fully recognised

Christina, Queen of Sweden

Gender iconoclast and pioneering intellectual

NOMINATED BY **GABRIELLE STOREY**

Christina, queen regnant of Sweden from 1632 until her abdication in 1654, was one of the most learned women of the 17th century. Her sexual identity and orientation have been the cause of much debate due to her cross dressing and self-declared disinterest in marriage, as well as her enthusiasm for activities such as hunting and swordplay, traditionally masculine hobbies.

From Christina's birth in December 1626, her gender identity sparked discussion, as she was mistaken for a son due to her swollen genitals and being born with a caul (the amniotic membrane covering a fetus). Perhaps hoping for a son, Christina's father ensured that his daughter had an education fit for a prince, which may have impacted Christina's decision to engage in traditionally masculine hobbies. These two points led to the theory that Christina was intersex. However the 20th century exhumation of her remains has nullified this point.

Indeed, the terminology we use today to describe gender and sexuality did not exist in the 1600s, and it's therefore complex to both define her and think of how she would have defined herself. Her refusal to marry and bear children, alongside the many scandalous rumours of her relationships with both men and women, have led to some proclamations of Christina as being lesbian or bisexual. Christina's potential relationship with a lady-in-waiting, Ebba Sparre, has also been held as evidence of her interest in women. Without conclusive evidence, her sexuality cannot be defined: and even if such evidence survived, it would not be accurate to categorise her according to modern-day terminology.

Of Christina's rule, we know much more. She amassed paintings, manuscripts, coins and scientific instruments in Stockholm and regularly corresponded with philosophers, authors and scholars. She pushed for peace during the European Wars of Religion, and her conversion to Catholicism in 1652 was one of the reasons behind her abdication.

A contemporary portrait of Christina, Queen of Sweden, who remains a source of fascination in LGBTQ history



Much of her later life was spent travelling around Europe engaged in scholarly pursuits.

Centuries on from her death in 1689, Christina's gender and sexuality continue to enthral historians, biographers, novelists, filmmakers and everyone in between. Although we are no closer to an answer for her sexuality and identity, she continues to be a growing source of fascination and exploration in LGBTQ history.



.....
Dr Gabrielle Storey is a historian of monarchy and gender

Dr Cecil Belfield Clarke

Campaigning doctor and civil-rights activist

NOMINATED BY **STEPHEN BOURNE**

In 2023, a blue plaque for Cecil Belfield Clarke was erected at London South Bank University, on a library building at the site of his former surgery. It's a fitting testament to a man whose motivation and drive helped save, and change, lives both in London and in Britain as a whole.

Born in Barbados in 1894, Clarke won a scholarship to study at the University of Cambridge. He graduated in 1918, qualifying as a surgeon two years later and establishing a medical practice at 112 Newington Causeway, near Elephant and Castle in south-east London. He went on to work in the district for the next 45 years, serving a population mostly comprised of working-class people living in the area's poor housing. Clarke's innovations included



Cecil Belfield Clarke, pictured at his surgery in 1949, was a pioneer within both the fields of medicine and civil rights

// An entire wall of Clarke's surgery had been blown away, and the gas and water disconnected. Yet he carried on treating patients regardless //



Exploring LGBTQ stories

Read more about the lives of LGBTQ people from history: historyextra.com/topic/lgbtq-history



Alan

A symbol of the human toll – and stigma – of HIV/Aids

NOMINATED BY **GEORGE SEVERS**

Of the thousands of people who have died from Aids-related conditions, many of them gay men, some names loom large. Rock Hudson. Freddie Mercury. Terrence Higgins. On the day of the Lesbian and Gay Pride in London 1989, another name rose more literally. Above a sea of faces – some smiling in revelry, others more sombre – a placard bore the name 'Alan' in bold capital letters. Beneath it, the sign read "my best & dearest friend died Pride Day '88". On that tragic anniversary, Alan's friend asked fellow marchers to "make safety his memorial". Alan's death, the sombre faces of those in the crowd, and the placard's call for a memorial are powerful reminders of the ways in which HIV/Aids was felt in the late 1980s.

The need to make safety Alan's memorial was part of a wider sexual health campaign that sought to make condoms and non-penetrative sex part of the gay sexual landscape (or, as American author-activists Michael Callen and Richard Berkowitz put it in the title of their 1983 book: *How to Have Sex in an Epidemic*).

But why should this photograph be Alan's only memorial? If the photographer Gordon

inventing the formula for administering the correct dosage of medicine to children, a groundbreaking development known as the 'Clarke Rule'.

When Elephant and Castle was heavily bombed during the Second World War Blitz, Clarke kept his practice open. During the terrible firestorm of May 1941, in which enemy aircraft destroyed most of the area's buildings, Clarke's surgery miraculously survived. Writing to the BBC radio producer Una Marson to decline the offer of making a guest appearance in her series *Calling the West Indies*, Clarke informed her that an entire wall had been blown away, the gas and water had been disconnected, and that a tarpaulin roof had been erected – yet he carried on treating his patients regardless.

Clarke's achievements extended beyond the realm of medicine, too. In 1931, he joined forces with London-based Jamaican Dr Harold Moody and, along with several others, co-founded the League of Coloured Peoples. The League was central to Britain's Black civil rights movement, assisting in the fight to end discrimination and to liberate Britain's colonies.

In his private life, Clarke shared a home, which he named 'Belfield House', in the London borough of Barnet with his lifelong partner, Edward 'Pat' Walter.

Until 1967, same-sex relationships between men were outlawed, so Clarke concealed his relationship with 'Pat' by employing him as his 'secretary'. Clarke retired in 1965 and died on 28 November 1970. Pat continued to live in Barnet until he died, at the age of 96, in 1999.



.....
Stephen Bourne is a writer and social historian specialising in Black heritage and gay culture

The placard for 'Alan' at the 1989 Pride march in London. The man's anonymity reveals much about how HIV/Aids was viewed in the era



Rainsford had not captured his arresting image of the scene that day in 1989, would we even know to place this name into our histories of HIV/Aids?

For some people who died from Aids-related conditions, the powerful forces of shame, stigma and homophobia had an enormous impact on the ways in which their lives – and their deaths – were marked and remembered. So heightened was the fear of HIV, both the virus itself and of being linked to it by association, that many families never revealed the cause of their relative's death. It was all too common for lesbians and gay men to sit through their friends' funerals, ostracised to the back row, while the deaths were attributed to cancer or unexpected accidents.

Was Alan's family like this? Is this chance photograph the only record we have of his life as a gay man living with HIV in the 1980s? We may never know. But by holding up his name, Alan's 'dearest friend' offered a powerful reminder of the faceless thousands whose lives were undervalued and whose deaths went unacknowledged.



.....
Dr George Severs is a historian of HIV/Aids, sexual violence and sexual health in modern Britain, based at the Geneva Graduate Institute

Shivananda Khan Champion of LGBTQ immigrants of colour

NOMINATED BY **SOMAK BISWAS**

Born in India in 1948, Shivananda Khan shifted to England when he was 10 years old. Attending university in Manchester in the 1960s, at a time when Britain's sexual liberation movements were in full swing, Khan was inspired to get involved with queer activism. In 1988, he founded Shakti, the first south Asian LGBTQ organisation in Britain, alongside fellow gay activists Poulomi Desai, Pratibha Parmar, Savi Hensman and Sunil Gupta.

Shakti broke new ground by creating a dedicated space for queer south Asians in London. Its journal, *Shakti Khabar*, was circulated widely in Britain, Europe and south Asia – and especially in India, Pakistan and Nepal. Khan developed crucial transnational links with similar south Asian organisations in Canada (Khush) and the US (Trikone). They foregrounded shared issues affecting queer south Asians in the



Shivananda Khan (1948–2013), pictured at a conference in 2009, was a pioneering figure in highlighting the experiences of LGBTQ south Asian people

west: persistent invisibility in mainstream gay movements, a lack of community and support, and widespread homophobia within the diaspora. Shakti highlighted the exclusions that shaped the lives of queer south Asians, but at the same time also created new opportunities for forging communities.

In 1991, against the backdrop of the Aids epidemic, Khan co-founded the Naz Foundation. While south Asian communities formed the foundation's primary target in Britain, this focus expanded over the coming decades to include Middle Eastern, north African and Latin American communities. Naz thrived in London's vibrant multicultural ethos, plugging the need for an organisation catering to communities of colour.

Simultaneously, it expanded rapidly across south Asia, developing programmes for a range of LGBTQ communities, women and sex workers in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. It assembled an extraordinary repertoire of activists, resources and workers who proved key to LGBTQ health and activism in Britain and south Asia. In India, Naz spearheaded the legal campaign against Article 377 that led to the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 2018.

Through Naz, Khan emerged as a leading voice for queer immigrants of colour, proving instrumental in fostering platforms unifying the diverse landscapes occupied by queer south Asians around the world. **FI**



.....
Dr Somak Biswas is a historian of modern Britain and south Asia and postdoctoral fellow at the University of Cambridge

// Khan foregrounded shared issues affecting queer south Asians in the west, including persistent invisibility in mainstream gay movements //



MICHAEL WOOD ON... THE BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR

// From Africa to the Indian subcontinent, imperialism has left a trail of damage //

OVER THE PAST FOUR MONTHS I HAVE WATCHED the Israel-Gaza war with horror. And I have been struck by the growing international reaction to it all: the stark division between the Western world and the rising 'Global South', which increasingly no longer accepts the 'rules-based order' that it sees as being imposed by the West to support its hegemony. It feels like a big moment in history. Is a new world order emerging?

It has left me reflecting on the legacy of the age of colonialism. Some influential modern historians have argued that colonial powers were, on balance, a force for good, improving the lot of humanity. I disagree – and that is even before we mention the climate catastrophe, largely caused by the ravages of international capitalism.

In my job, I have travelled the world and seen for myself the aftermath of empire. From apartheid South Africa and the Congo through to Afghanistan, the Americas and the Indian subcontinent, colonialism and imperialism have left a trail of damage. And that damage is both psychological and material. The development of traditional societies has been disrupted and arrested, ancient cultural identities have been erased in a few generations. And, as current events show, we are still living with the divisions we bequeathed.

Those divisions are laid bare in a powerful documentary by Krishnendu and Madhurima Bose, *Bay of Blood*, about the liberation war in Bangladesh in 1971. This story is largely forgotten today outside that country, but it is part of one of the most significant events in the history of the modern world, one in which the aftermath of empire had a catastrophic impact on millions of lives: the partition of India. Or perhaps we should say the *partitions* of India, because they took place over the course of a century. In fact, the tensions currently besetting Kashmir suggest that they are not over yet.

The viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, initiated this process with the short-lived partition of Bengal in 1905. (The British divided East and West Bengal on religious grounds to constrain voices for independence in Bengal, which was the intellectual powerhouse of 19th-century India.) Then, in 1947, came the great partition, which was driven, too, by religion. With huge loss of life, and the forced transfers of entire populations, British India was divided into three: India, and East and West Pakistan. It beggars belief that this arrangement could ever have been contemplated, let alone put into practice: a single country, Pakistan, whose two halves were separated by a thousand miles – one Urdu speaking, the other Bengali, with nothing in common but religion. The cognitive dissonance of this whole disastrous idea was summed up in the founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah's, infamous speech declaring that "Urdu and only Urdu" would be the national language, and that those who thought otherwise were "enemies of Pakistan".

In the new country, all power rested with West Pakistan. East Pakistan was denied money, resources and influence. Inevitably, an independence movement grew, and in an election in December 1970, the East Pakistan Awami League won the right to rule the entire country. Needless to say, the West Pakistan establishment didn't accept that, and the Pakistan army plunged the East into a nightmare that saw massacres, mass rape and the systematic murder of intellectuals, driven by racism towards the darker-skinned Bengalis. All this is harrowingly told in *Bay of Blood*. The crisis was only resolved by the heroic determination of Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi, who intervened on behalf of East Bengal. The Pakistani army was swiftly routed and a new country was born: Bangladesh.

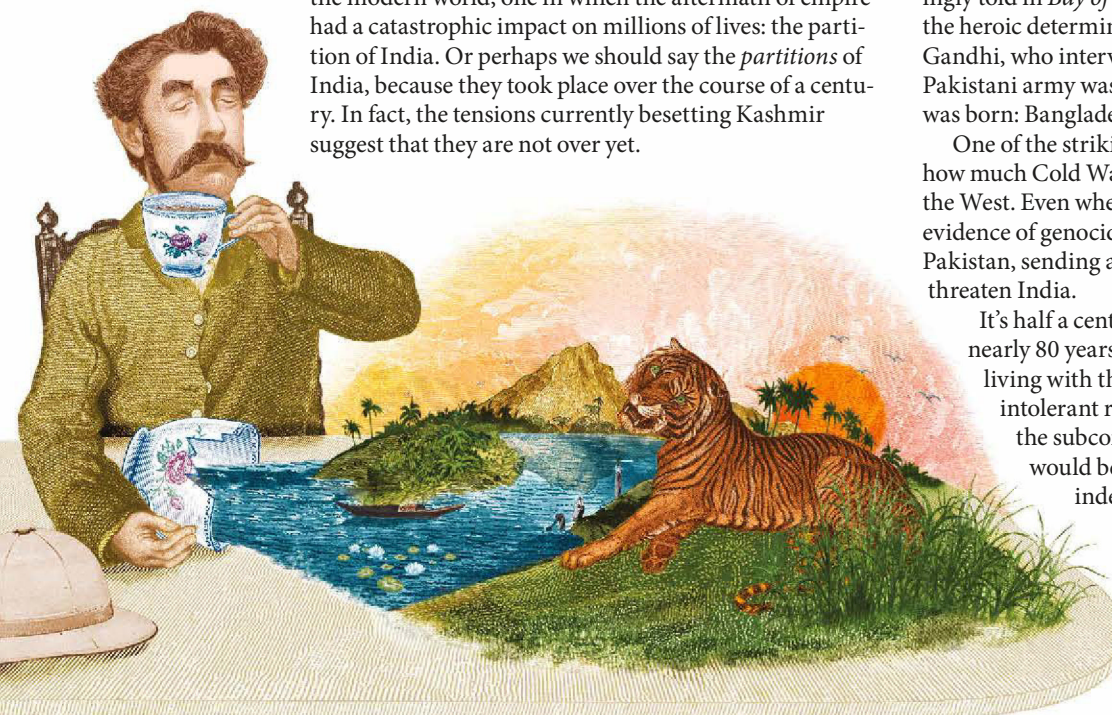
One of the striking factors of this terrible episode was how much Cold War politics determined the mindsets of the West. Even when the Americans were shown clear evidence of genocide they still supported their client West Pakistan, sending a battle group to the Indian Ocean to threaten India.

It's half a century since these tragic events, and nearly 80 years since the partition of 1947. We are still living with the consequences, with increasingly intolerant religious nationalisms emerging across the subcontinent. Jawaharlal Nehru – who would become the first prime minister of an independent India – set out his hopes for a secular state celebrating India's "unity in diversity". For now, at least, that noble aspiration seems to be receding. **H**

ILLUSTRATION BY FEMKE DE JONG

Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series. His latest book is *In the Footsteps of Du Fu* (Simon & Schuster, 2023). You'll find him on X at [MichaelWoodMV](#)

BBC





HIDDEN HISTORIES

KAVITA PURI on the legacy of Canada's residential schools

// Indigenous children were forcibly separated from their families //

I RECENTLY SAT DOWN TO WATCH THE LATEST incarnation of LM Montgomery's classic novel *Anne of Green Gables* with my younger daughter. Reading the book and watching the 1980s television adaptation – starring Megan Follows as the 19th-century Canadian orphan Anne Shirley – had been such a rite of passage for me, and I wanted it to be the same for my own children.

Having been so familiar with the original story, I was surprised to find that Netflix and CBC's 2017 adaptation, *Anne with an E*, had taken on a degree of dramatic licence, including the addition of a subplot about Anne's friendship with an Indigenous girl named Ka'kwet. The carefully researched storyline, in which Ka'kwet is mistreated by the nuns at one of Canada's notorious residential schools, was well received not only in Canada, but by viewers further afield. Overall, the series was praised for tackling a difficult topic and bringing the stories of Indigenous Canadians to a wider audience.

However, the story took on a new dimension when, less than two years after the final season of *Anne with an E* arrived on Netflix in 2020, archaeologists detected what they believed to be the unmarked graves of around 215 Indigenous students who had attended a real-life residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia. Reacting to the news in May 2021, Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau said it was "a painful reminder of that dark and shameful chapter of our country's history", and declared

that the flags on all federal buildings should be lowered to half-mast in honour of "all Indigenous children who never made it home, the survivors and their families". A month later, a further 751 graves were found at the site of another school in Saskatchewan.

To understand the context behind the discoveries, it is first necessary to know about the history of Canada's so-called Indian Act. Passed in 1876, the legislation put strict controls on the nation's Indigenous communities, including the taking of children – often forcibly – to live in religious schools across Canada. By the time the last institution closed in 1998, an estimated 150,000 students had passed through their doors. Separated from their families and communities, the children were made to convert to Christianity and forbidden to speak their ancestral languages or practise their traditional beliefs. Thousands of students are believed to have died as a result of disease, violence, malnutrition and neglect, with many also experiencing severe physical and sexual abuse.

The Canadian government has since made several attempts to address the injustices associated with the residential school system, albeit with mixed results. In 2008, the then prime minister Stephen Harper issued a public apology, while a body named the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was set up in the same year to examine the system and hear from thousands of survivors. In 2015, the TRC published its

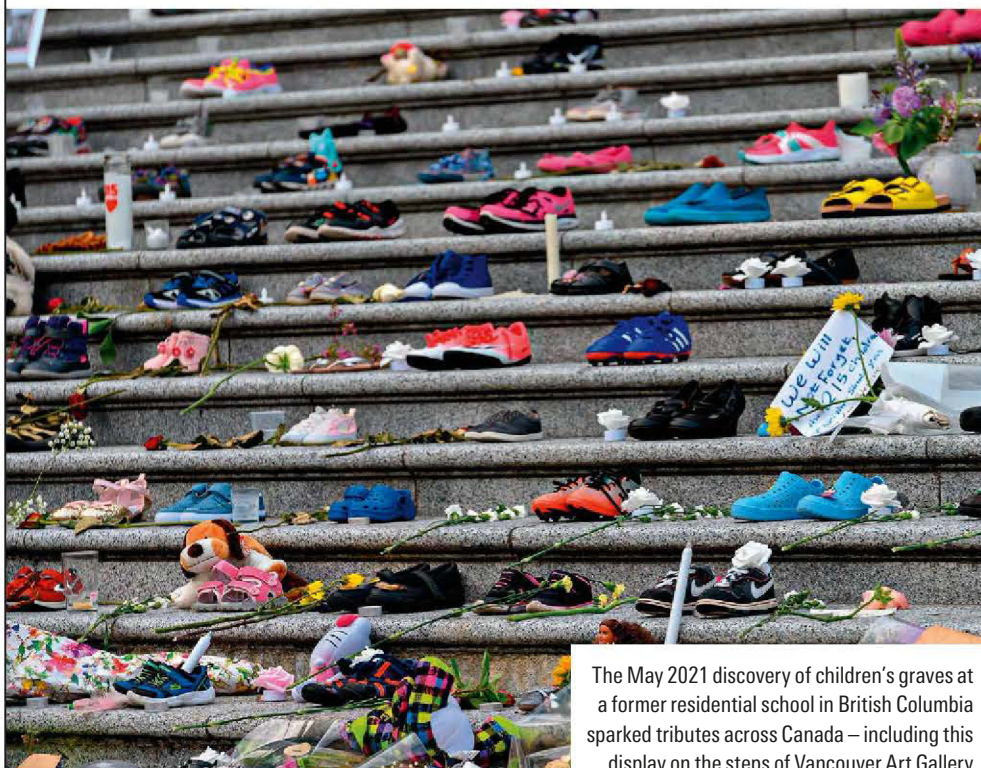
final report and issued a long list of recommendations, stating that the schools had been responsible for a "cultural genocide". Despite this, Indigenous campaign groups say that very few of the recommendations have actually been taken on board.

As of 2024, unmarked graves continue to be uncovered, and vast inequalities between Canada's Indigenous communities and the wider Canadian population persist. Acknowledging wrongdoing and allowing survivors to speak out about their experiences are both important, but they are arguably only the first steps towards achieving healing and justice. Indeed, some campaigners have called for an independent investigation into the deaths of the children – and even criminal charges.

If anything, the continuing controversy surrounding Canada's residential schools serves as an example of how historical injustices can remain 'live' issues in the present day, and the challenges of seeking to right wrongs that have left such long-lasting effects. **H**

Kavita Puri

is a journalist and broadcaster for BBC Radio 4. Her new series about the Bengal famine, *Three Million*, will be available soon. See page 57 for more details



The May 2021 discovery of children's graves at a former residential school in British Columbia sparked tributes across Canada – including this display on the steps of Vancouver Art Gallery

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A 19th-century depiction of the princes in the Tower. Philippa Langley's new take on their fate continues to spark debate

LETTER OF THE MONTH

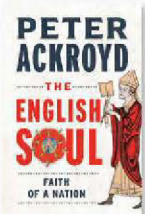
Humanitarian hero

Edward Abel Smith's article on Nicholas Winton (*Amazing Life*, January) mentions that the Prague office of the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia was "led by a remarkable woman called Doreen Warriner". But I wonder how many readers know just how remarkable she was.

Aged 34 in 1938, she had a flourishing academic career and had just finished her first major book, *The Economics of Peasant Farming*, based on three years of research in eastern Europe. Ashamed of the Munich Agreement and impelled by a desperate wish to do something, she temporarily abandoned academia and flew to Prague. She soon realised that the people most immediately in danger were the Social Democrat leaders who had opposed Hitler's plans for the Sudetenland. Enlisting the help of the Labour Party in Britain and the Swedish trade union movement, she organised the escape of 250 Social Democrat MPs and trade union leaders through Poland.

It was the beginning of a programme of evacuation that, in the words of one of her colleagues, saved "hundreds, possibly thousands, of Jewish and Social Democrat lives", organised by a woman of "competence and compassion who was never too solemn or too earnest" (*The Times*, 30 December 1972). She was still in Prague when the Germans took over in March 1939, and finally left in April, shortly before the Gestapo came to her hotel to find her. I hope that the recent film *One Life* does her justice.

Dr Paul Brassley, Newton Abbot



We reward the Letter of the Month writer with a copy of a new history book. This issue, that is *The English Soul: Faith of a Nation* by Peter Ackroyd. You can read our review on page 72

Historical balance

I thought it harsh of C Alexander (*Letters*, February) to refer to Philippa Langley as an "amateur historian". Langley has studied the Wars of the Roses and Richard III's reign for many years, and written plenty of researched articles on the period.

However, for the sake of balance and reader interest, the input of well-known historians such as Nathen Amin and Michael Jones could have added valuable contributions on the topic of Langley's new theory about the princes in the Tower.

Norma Postin, Rugby

Princes and parliament

Philippa Langley gives some interesting evidence in her defence of Richard III (*Books Interview*, January) but, unfortunately, falls at the first hurdle. She accepts, in a single line, the declaration by parliament that the two princes in the Tower are illegitimate. But parliament was not a democratic body: Richard controlled the chamber absolutely with his patronage and power, and it's no surprise that he got the result he wanted, when he wanted it, to allow him to be crowned king in 1483.

To justify her claim that Richard was the rightful king, Langley must provide evidence that the marriage of the two princes' parents – Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville – was not valid, or she is not even on first base. It remains most likely that the princes in the Tower were killed on Richard's orders.

Derek Smith, Forest Gate

Capital destination

As a frequent visitor to Dublin, I enjoyed the suggestions for what to see in the Irish capital (*Historic Cities*, January). However, to my mind, one of the most extraordinary sites is the former House of Lords building in College Green, which features a large tapestry to William of Orange at the battle of the Boyne. Where else in the world would you see such a celebratory reminder right in the heart of a country in which the 'hero' has been seen as the 'enemy' for at least a century?

Stephen Dilworth, Bromley

Empirical value

As step-grandson of Major John Finlay of Force K6, I welcome your report (*Encounters*, January) on the exhibition in Glasgow about the contribution of the British Indian Army to the Allied cause in the Second World War.

An impressive memorial to the K6 men who died in Scotland was unveiled in Kingussie in 2022. It also recognises Isobel Harling BEM, who died in 2023 aged 100. She is buried in Kingussie cemetery, opposite the graves of nine Muslim British Indian Army soldiers that she had tended for 70 years.

The GlaswegAsians exhibition has been co-curated by the charity Colourful Heritage and Glasgow Museums. Over the past five years, I have been proud to contribute to the important work done by Colourful Heritage. It's the driving force behind a successful campaign to build Scotland's first national memorial to honour the British Indian Army. Construction will start early this year outside the front of Kelvingrove Art Gallery.

I believe that better recognition by people today that their freedoms are the result of the support of millions of troops from south Asia and elsewhere in the empire will contribute to more harmonious race and social relations.

Hamish Johnston, Inverness

Natural connections

Peter Coates' fascinating piece (*The War on Squirrels*, February) is just one example of the unintended consequences that can occur when non-native animals are introduced to



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➤ Page 34



Romola Garai as Doreen Warriner in recent film *One Life*. Reader Dr Paul Brassley highlights Warriner's work evacuating people from the occupied Sudetenland



Royal Indian Army Service Corps soldiers, 1942. Reader Hamish Johnston argues that the Second World War role of south Asian troops should be better recognised

foreign ecosystems. In 1890, US ornithologist Eugene Schieffelin tried to import some bird species previously unknown in the United States. Having been unsuccessful with chaffinches, bullfinches, skylarks and nightingales, he then released 60 starlings in New York's Central Park.

His primary intention was to combat the pests, especially beetles, ravaging US crops. What he did not foresee is that those 60 birds would become the 200 million that have now spread across the US, displaying aggressive behaviour, displacing native species, devouring crops and causing public health issues.

Ian MacDonald, Essex

Manchester's finest

Apologies! In last month's column I didn't submit an additional section in time on the illustrious women graduates of Manchester University. They include the engineer Tilly Shilling OBE; Catherine Chisholm, the first graduate in medicine; Christabel Pankhurst, the suffragette; and Ellen Wilkinson, who was the first female minister of education and famously led the Jarrow march in 1936.

Michael Wood, London

Nurses with an unexpected rodent visitor, London, 1918. Reader Ian MacDonald points to humanity's ability to disrupt fragile natural ecosystems



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Family drama

Portraits depicting the future Tudor queens Mary (left) and Elizabeth in their youth. Though divided by religion, the half-sisters had – at various stages of their lives – been close



SISTERS AT WAR

By the end of her reign, Mary I's relationship with her half-sister and successor, Elizabeth, was at an all-time low. But had the Tudor siblings always been such bitter enemies? **Nicola Tallis** reveals how the duo's bond was both broken and strengthened by events beyond their control



On 17 November 1558, Mary I died and was succeeded by her half-sister, Elizabeth. Upon receiving the news, Elizabeth declared that “the law of nature moveth me to sorrow for my sister”, for whom she professed to have wept tears of sorrow. Yet, despite her claim, there were few people who believed her to be sincere. Throughout the course of Mary’s reign, the relationship between the two sisters – who had once been close – had broken down beyond repair.

Elizabeth and Mary’s bond had faced significant challenges from the start, through no fault of either party. Elizabeth’s mother,

Anne Boleyn, had caused Mary great unhappiness, for her father Henry VIII’s intense passion for Anne had been the catalyst for his separation from Catherine of Aragon, Mary’s mother. By the time of Elizabeth’s birth on 7 September 1533, the teenage Mary had been rendered illegitimate by her father, their relationship lay in tatters, and her loathing for Anne Boleyn had peaked.

Though Elizabeth’s gender may have come as a disappointment to her parents, Henry still acknowledged her to be his legitimate heir, with pertinent consequences for Mary. The same day that Elizabeth was born, orders were given that Mary “the true princess should not be so called”, for instead, Elizabeth alone bore the title of ‘princess’. At three months old Elizabeth was sent to Hatfield,

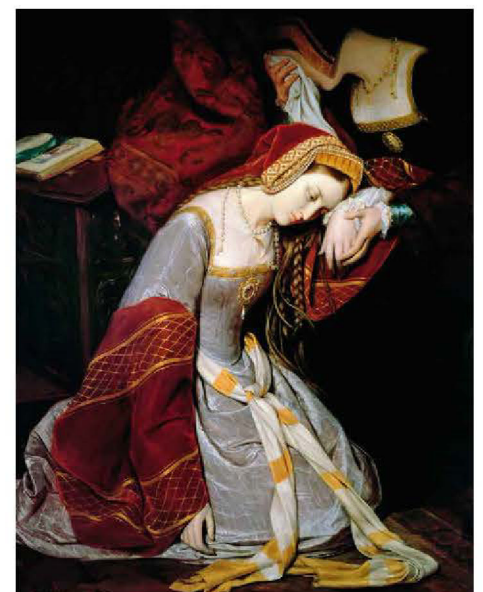
Hertfordshire, where her nursery was to be established, and she was soon joined by an unwilling Mary. Though Mary agreed that she might refer to Elizabeth as her sister, she utterly refused to have anything to do with the infant. Her insolence ensured that she remained estranged from her father, and was treated harshly by both Anne Boleyn and her relatives who oversaw life at Hatfield.

Finding common ground

For the first two and a half years of her life, Elizabeth took precedence over her sister – but Mary nevertheless took any opportunity she could to supersede her. Once, when the pair were travelling, Mary deliberately spurred her horse forward before Elizabeth’s litter, and she also took care to secure a better position whenever the two were in the royal barge. When it came to status, she would not willingly submit to second place.

In 1536, however, everything changed. On 19 May, Anne Boleyn was executed on charges of adultery, incest and treason – charges that were almost certainly falsified. We will never know the full extent of the impact her mother’s loss had on Elizabeth, who was not yet three years old, but it led to a dramatic shift in her relationship with Mary. The sisters were now of equal status, for with the fall of Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth was – like Mary – declared illegitimate. With Anne removed and Elizabeth motherless, Mary began to bond with her much younger sibling. So much so that, just two months after Anne’s death, she told their father that Elizabeth was “such a child toward, as I doubt not but your Highness shall have cause to rejoice of in time coming”.

Status update Elizabeth depicted as a child. For a period, starting in the late 1530s, she enjoyed a warm relationship with Mary



Downfall Anne Boleyn in the Tower of London. Her demise transformed the sisters’ relationship



Unhappy times The Old Palace at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire, where the teenage Mary was sent to live in December 1533. Anne Boleyn's relatives, who ran the household, treated the 'illegitimate' princess harshly

Over the course of the following decade, Elizabeth and Mary's relationship grew stronger, and the two were frequently seen together. Mary took a close interest in her sibling, whom she lavished with affection and gifts, including money with which to play card games, and silver thread to embroider a box. She also rewarded Elizabeth's minstrels, so we can surmise that the sisters spent time together enjoying entertainments. Likewise, Mary grew close to members of her sister's household, with whom she sometimes also exchanged gifts.

Throughout their father's reign the two sisters paid the occasional visit to court, and after Henry married Katherine Parr in 1543, they were there more regularly. When Katherine later assumed the role of regent in 1544, both Elizabeth and Mary spent the summer with her, enjoying a short progress in Surrey and Kent. They appeared every inch a happy family unit.

Switching allegiances

The royal family experienced further upheaval, however, when Henry VIII died on 28 January 1547. Elizabeth and Mary's nine-year-old half-brother, Edward, succeeded the throne, and this changed the course not only of the sisters' lives, but also marked the start of another change in their relationship. No longer would they spend as much time together, for Mary now established her own household while Elizabeth moved to join that of Katherine Parr – an arrangement that

Elizabeth took precedence over her sister – but Mary nevertheless used every opportunity to supersede her

was thrown into disarray when Katherine discovered that her fourth husband, Thomas Seymour, had been showing Elizabeth far more attention than was appropriate.

Katherine died from complications after childbirth in 1548, and Elizabeth, now 15, set up her own home. Though she and Mary kept in touch, the time they spent together during Edward's reign was infrequent. Just one letter between them survives from this period, written by Elizabeth to her "Good sister". It was a friendly piece of correspondence in which Elizabeth remarked that "you may well see by my writing so oft, how pleasant it is to

SIBLING RIVALRY

How Henry VIII's longed-for male heir, Prince Edward, changed the family dynamic

In October 1537, Elizabeth and Mary welcomed a new sibling when their stepmother Jane Seymour gave birth to the king's long-awaited male heir, Prince Edward. Both sisters played key roles at the christening, with Elizabeth tasked with carrying the child's christening robes and Mary made the baby's godmother.

Elizabeth and Mary doted on Edward, and during their father's reign the trio could often be found in one another's company. On one occasion Elizabeth gave her brother a shirt she had embroidered herself, and another time sent him her portrait.

With just four years between them, Elizabeth and Edward were natural playmates, and they also had religion in common – a subject that would later be a bone of contention between Edward and Mary. This became apparent at Christmas 1550, when the three royal siblings spent the festive season together for the last time. In a heated confrontation, Edward (by now Edward VI) took the opportunity to berate Mary for her failure to conform to his Protestant religious policies, leaving them both in tears.

By New Year Mary had left court, leaving Edward and Elizabeth to enjoy the feasts staged for the occasion. Though Mary would later be received "very kindly" by Edward, religion continued to divide them. Elizabeth, meanwhile, took pride in being "the King's Majesty's most honourable sister", and was always treated with reverence at his court. His death, in 1553, came as a crushing blow to her.



A sketch showing the infant Prince Edward, later Edward VI, at his christening in 1537. Mary and Elizabeth played key roles in the service

PROFESSORS · AND · DEFENDORS
TRUE · CATHOLICKE · F



Erasing history A 1597 painting depicts the reigning monarch, Elizabeth I, alongside Henry VIII and Edward VI. Poignantly, Mary I is excluded from the scene, overlooked by other members of her dynasty



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me". But it would not be long before her relationship with Mary was put to the test once more.

In the spring of 1553, 15-year-old Edward VI's health began to fail, and on 6 July, he died. Determined to ensure a Protestant succession, which he knew would be impossible if the fervently Catholic Mary succeeded him, the young monarch had, shortly before his death, drafted a 'Devise' that excluded both Mary and Elizabeth from the succession on the grounds of their illegitimacy. Instead, Edward's 'Devise' named their cousin Lady Jane Grey as heir. However, after a reign that lasted a mere nine days, Jane was deposed, and Mary declared queen in her stead. Elizabeth had been silent as the battle for power between Jane and Mary played out, but upon Mary's accession, she wasted no time in writing to congratulate her sister.

Determined to be seen by Mary's side and aware that, for the first time, her sister wielded authority over her, Elizabeth set out to meet Mary in person and "offer her fealty as was fitting". She was welcomed "with great warmth", and the following day Elizabeth joined the queen as Mary made her ceremonial entry into London. She could not have

Determined to be seen by Mary's side, Elizabeth set out to meet her in person and "offer her fealty as was fitting"

failed to notice Mary's popularity, for the Londoners were out in full force to celebrate the queen's accession. It was a triumphant moment for Mary, and one that Elizabeth was there to share with her.

Suspicion and intrigue

As Mary's reign began, relations between the two half-sisters were warm, and the queen showed her younger sibling "every mark of honour". But behind the scenes, Elizabeth had enemies who were working to undermine it. She was, after all, now heir to the throne, and having been raised a Protestant, she was also on the opposite side of the religious spectrum to Mary.

The queen's chief supporters, the imperial ambassadors of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, believed Elizabeth to be "clever and sly", and were adamant that she could not be trusted. Their views were reinforced when, within weeks of Mary's accession, pressure was brought to bear on Elizabeth to conform to the religious changes Mary was implementing. Although she appeared to do so, there were few who believed her to be sincere. The queen herself became suspicious when Elizabeth once tried to excuse herself from attending mass by complaining loudly "that her stomach ached". Mary nevertheless attempted to push her doubts to one side, reverting to type and lavishing gifts of jewellery upon her sister.

Further cracks in the siblings' relationship appeared following the queen's first parliament in October. The session saw the legislation declaring Mary illegitimate reversed, which, coupled with her queen-ship, rendered her far superior to Elizabeth in status. This, along with the hostility instilled by Elizabeth's enemies, seems to have led to a change in her attitude and mindset, for Mary now held Elizabeth "in small account". She became determined not to allow her sister to



Mary depicted on a legal document from 1553 – the year her reign began. She was initially popular with the public



Troubled union Mary and Philip of Spain depicted on a 1555 document. The couple's inability to produce an heir greatly weakened Mary's grip on power

C O P I A
D'VNA LETTERA VENUTA DI LONDRA
DALLA CORTE DELLA REGINA
D'INGHILTERRA.

Doue narra, il fatto d'arme fatto fra la Regina, e i suoi ribelli, con il nome di tutti li Capi principali di detti ribelli, & la causa donde e proceduta la ribellione, con la mortalita de l'uno & l'altro esercito, con il numero delli prigionieri fatti dalla Regina, e la giustizia ch'essa a fatto, e fa di giorno in giorno, contra di detti ribelli.

Ervna Oratione bellissima, fatta da detta Regina, in pubblico a tutto il Popolo di Londra, & a tutti Capi del Regno d'Inghilterra.



The title page of a publication about Wyatt's rebellion. The men behind the uprising – launched in opposition to Mary's plans to marry Philip of Spain – wanted to put Elizabeth on the throne

succeed her, because of her "heretical opinions, illegitimacy and characteristics in which she resembled her mother". By December, the atmosphere had become so toxic that Elizabeth withdrew from court, but her situation was soon to take an even more drastic downward turn.

In early 1554, a group of Protestants led by the Kentish nobleman Sir Thomas Wyatt staged an uprising in opposition to Mary's planned marriage to Philip of Spain. Elizabeth was herself implicated in the rebellion, of which she seems to have had some knowledge and which, though crushed, saw her cousin Lady Jane Grey executed on account of her father's complicity. Elizabeth was summoned to London, but when she reached the Palace of Whitehall, Mary refused to see her, telling the imperial ambassador Simon Renard that "Elizabeth's character was just what she had always believed it to be". She was adamant that her sister had been plotting

against her, and to try to force Elizabeth to confess her guilt, gave orders for her to be sent to the Tower of London.

Irreparable damage

Knowing that her mother had lost her life within the Tower's walls, Elizabeth panicked and wrote Mary a desperate letter in which she urged her "to remember your last promise and my last demand, that I be not condemned without answer and due proof". By the time Elizabeth had finished writing, the tide of the Thames had changed direction, thereby preventing access to the Tower for another few hours. Yet Mary remained unswayed by her sister's pleas, and instead ordered her to be conveyed to the Tower the next day. It would prove to be the most terrifying ordeal of Elizabeth's life, and one from which her relationship with Mary would never recover.

Elizabeth maintained that "she had never been guilty of having acted or said anything

against the queen”, and despite the best efforts of Mary’s councillors to wring a confession from her, she never provided one. Mary nevertheless remained convinced of her sister’s wrongdoing, but as the weeks passed it became clear that there were no lawful grounds on which the queen could act against her. Mary was at last forced to concede that Elizabeth could not remain in the Tower, but she was determined not to allow her to go free. After two months in the fortress, on 19 May – the anniversary of Anne Boleyn’s execution – Elizabeth was removed and began her journey to Woodstock Palace, Oxfordshire, where she was to spend almost another year under house arrest.

Though at Woodstock Elizabeth was allowed to write occasional letters to Mary, one of which Renard claimed was “as bold as anything I have ever seen”, she was largely ignored by her sister. Mary was instead busy preparing for her wedding to Philip of Spain, which took place in July. Thoughts of Elizabeth’s fate continued to occupy her mind, though, and in April 1555 she finally summoned her sister to Hampton Court. Here, Mary was awaiting the arrival of her first child – a child that would replace Elizabeth as Mary’s heir, much to her gratification.

When the sisters at last came face to face for the first time in over a year, there was no happy reunion. Instead, Mary greeted Elizabeth coldly, still seething that “you will not confess your offence, but stand stoutly to your truth”. It was clear that she had no desire to reconcile despite Elizabeth’s assurances that she was “your true subject”.

Mary would have no child, and it is feasible that she experienced a phantom pregnancy. Her sorrow did nothing to mellow her attitude towards Elizabeth, who to her displeasure remained her heir. With one eye to the future, Mary’s husband Philip, however, recognised the sense of keeping his wife’s sister on side, and Elizabeth later acknowledged that Philip had “shown her favour and helped to obtain her release”. She was now at her liberty. To please her husband, Mary tried to dissemble “her hatred and anger as much as she can”, endeavouring in public to receive Elizabeth “with every sort of graciousness and honour”. But it was all an act.

Succession crisis

As Mary’s reign progressed and it became clear that she would not produce a child, Elizabeth’s confidence grew. Despite further plots against the queen – notably a failed conspiracy led by Henry Dudley, in which several of Elizabeth’s servants were implicated – Mary dared not act against her sister. She had no child of her own to succeed her, and was thus acutely aware that – whether she



A new era Elizabeth shown in 1563, five years after succeeding Mary as queen. The Protestant monarch had been named heir to the throne a mere 11 days before Mary’s death

liked it or not – Elizabeth was looking increasingly likely to succeed her as queen. She nevertheless bore Elizabeth an “evil disposition” and declared her disbelief in her sister’s parentage, for she was “born of an infamous woman”. Prompted by fruitless rumours that the queen was again pregnant, the siblings met for the last time in February 1558, by which time Mary’s grasp on power was getting weaker by the day.

There was to be no reconciliation between the two, and as Mary’s health grew progressively worse that autumn, her antipathy towards Elizabeth remained. She “would never call her sister, nor be persuaded that

she was her father’s daughter”. It was not until 6 November that, realising she was in the final stages of her life, Mary formally acknowledged Elizabeth as her heir. Though she had long been considering alternative successors, including her cousin Lady Margaret Douglas, Mary was aware that Elizabeth was the only heir that her council – and her people – would accept.

Eleven days later, Mary died, and though Elizabeth paid for her sister’s funeral, she ignored her wishes that she be buried alongside her mother, Catherine of Aragon. Indeed, the bitterness that had enveloped the final years of the sisters’ relationship continued long after Mary’s demise, with a Spanish envoy claiming that Elizabeth remained “highly indignant” about the treatment she had received during her reign. Their fates had been entwined since the beginning, but it was a sad conclusion for the siblings who had once been so close. **H**

Nicola Tallis is an author and historian. Her latest book is *Young Elizabeth: Princess. Prisoner. Queen* (Michael O’Mara, 2024)

Elizabeth I is the subject of an episode of BBC Radio 4’s **Great Lives**. Listen at bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b0076fdw **BBC RADIO 4**

Mary was aware that Elizabeth was the only heir that her council – and her people – would accept



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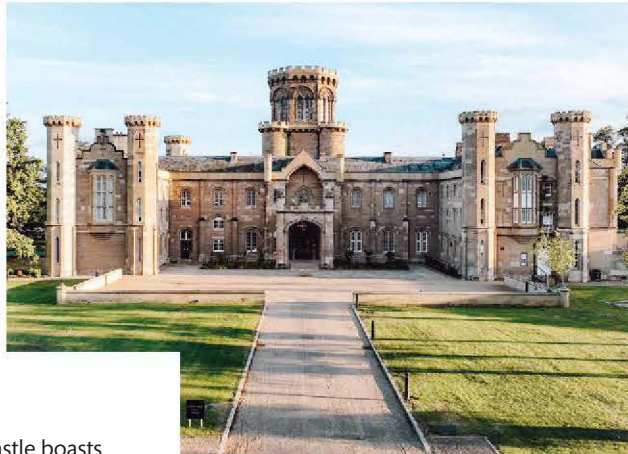


**HOLME LACY HOUSE,
HEREFORDSHIRE**

You'll find several spectacular original features at this Grade I listed mansion – one of the largest in Herefordshire. Much of the interior design work was created by Grinling

Gibbons, one of the great wood carvers of the 1700s, while you'll also discover 99 Indian elephants carved into hedges around the property – if you look hard enough. Holme Lacy hosted Charles I in 1645, just four years before his execution, while Prime Minister William Pitt the Elder was known to conduct cabinet meetings in the grounds.

The hotel is set within a conservation area with 20 acres of gardens – which is also Grade I listed – including a 300-year-old apple orchard and a fishing lake, which makes for some particularly idyllic angling. Indoors, you can easily while away hours in the charmingly decorated Blue Room with its 30-foot ceilings, and the Pavilion promises some memorable evenings of entertainment.



STUDLEY CASTLE, WARWICKSHIRE

Refashioned in 2017, Studley Castle boasts Grade II listed status and promises eye-catching architectural features from the Gothic Revival, including gargoyles on the exterior and ornate ceilings and regal wood panelling within. Through time, the building's purpose has often changed, from serving as Lady Warwick's Studley Agricultural College for Women to acting as a Women's Land Army training camp during both WWI and WWII.

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Few hotels in the world can boast a beautifully preserved mosaic within the ruins of a Roman villa on their grounds, but that's just a small part of this Grade I listed Tudor manor's story. This location has hosted Civil War armies and seen the planning of the D-Day landings in the library, too. And it's said to be where Henry VIII first courted his third wife Jane Seymour, whose grandmother Elizabeth Darrell lived at the property.

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THE GREAT WHEELBARROW CRAZE

In 1886, the nation was gripped by a bizarre trend that saw plucky Britons racing wheelbarrows across the country.

David Musgrove takes up this strange-but-true story

ILLUSTRATION BY FEMKE DE JONG



Sawdust Jack and James Gordon are not names that have gone down in the annals of sporting history. Yet in 1886, they were at the centre of an athletic endurance contest that briefly held the eyes of the British nation.

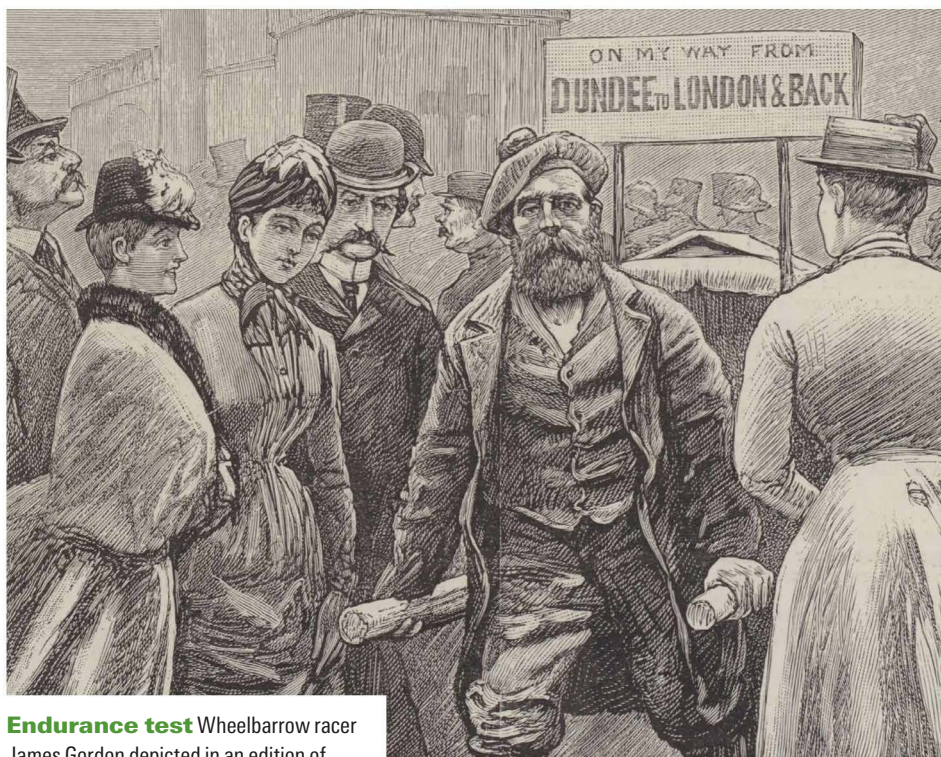
It was mid-November, and John Martin, better known as Sawdust Jack, was whipping up a storm in Newcastle. He was trying to make his way through the city, but he was blocked by an enthusiastic crowd of supporters, lustily cheering him on, at every turn. He was a slim-built man, dressed as a labourer, but with an oversized and battered high silk hat, upon which was affixed an advertisement for a Newcastle hairdresser. The key item of his equipment was being pushed, rather than worn: after all, this was the year that the great wheelbarrow craze began.

Sawdust Jack, if he could only extract himself from the crowd, intended to race all the way from Newcastle to London, but with the impediment of a heavy wheelbarrow to push in front of him. He proposed to cover at least 30 miles a day, but his main object was to overtake another wheelbarrow pedestrian and beat him to the capital.

His adversary was a Scotsman named James Gordon, who had the disadvantage of having started on his barrow attempt almost 200 miles further north, but the advantage of a lighter barrow and a considerable head start. Gordon had left his hometown of Dundee in early November, clad in a brown tam o'shanter, coat and trousers of a similar hue, and stout leggings. He passed through Newcastle on 13 November, where he was similarly met by a surging crowd, cheered on by massed street urchins and serenaded by a band from a travelling menagerie. When Sawdust Jack finally extricated himself from his supporters and left Newcastle on 21 November, Gordon was long gone – more than 100 miles south of him in Doncaster, with but 170 miles left between his wheelbarrow and London.

The race was on, but unsurprisingly, it never really got going. Sawdust Jack only made it as far as Selby, after 105 miles and four days, when he gave up owing to lack of support. However, James Gordon progressed onwards to London, where he was welcomed like a conquering hero. He was even treated to write-ups in several major newspapers, including the *Illustrated London News*, which described him as “a very poor man, but a brave one”.

After receiving the adulation of the capital, Gordon made his way back north, arriving home in Dundee on New Year's Day 1887, whereupon the crowds were so boisterous



Endurance test Wheelbarrow racer James Gordon depicted in an edition of *The Illustrated London News*. The Scotsman hit the headlines after trundling from his native Dundee to London – and back again

that he was nearly killed and had his barrow smashed by the jubilant locals.

Fasting and pigeon-eating

So, what on earth had got into people to make wheelbarrow-walking such a celebrity activity? This is a question that I grapple with in my new HistoryExtra podcast series, *The Tiger Tamer Who Went to Sea* (see page 52), but it seems that it was partly down to newspapers with an eye for a story. The details of the barrow combatants were reported widely in the papers of the day, particularly within the pages of the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, which stoked the frenzy and revelled in branding it the “wheelbarrow craze”.

Yet it appears that this was a period particularly prone to fads and crazes – and not just those related to wheelbarrows. In 1886, the same year as the barrowing began, there was a fasting craze. Inspired by an Italian named Merlatti who was fasting in Paris, various people followed his lead and tried to starve themselves for days on end. According to the *Buchan Observer and East Aberdeenshire Advertiser*, these included an English lady who kept a boarding house, a minister of foreign extraction in Kent, a buxom young lyric artiste from New York, and an Anglicised Frenchman who painted silk for a living.

Skiping forwards a few years, there was also a craze dedicated to eating, not fasting: the pigeon-eating craze of 1901. Indeed, the *Burnley Gazette* of 13 March that year recorded that the trend was spreading across Yorkshire, with several men attempting to eat a pigeon a day for 15 days on the trot. As ever, things escalated, with a Nottinghamshire

The crowds were so boisterous that James Gordon was nearly killed and had his barrow smashed by the jubilant locals

man called Sproston deciding to eat a page of the local newspaper before tucking into his pigeon.

There was also an appetite for people undertaking long-distance challenges. According to a round-up published in the 7 March 1908 edition of the *Northern Weekly Gazette*, these endeavours were similarly eccentric: a few years earlier, a “Danish journalist [had] started to walk round the world with his hands tied”, while a “young German travelled from Hamburg to New York in a packing case 6ft long, 4ft high and 3ft wide”.

Jumping on the handwagon

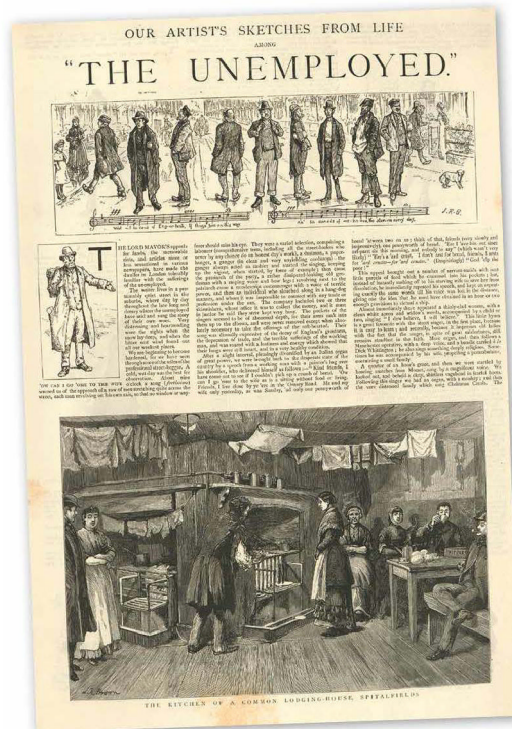
So that's the context of the wheelbarrowing antics of Sawdust Jack and James Gordon, but it was the newspapers that fostered the rivalry. As so often happens, it wasn't long before they started to take aim at the very people they'd built up. Reports soon began to take on a distinctly mocking tone, expressing incredulity at the ridiculousness of the endeavour, with one correspondent worrying that were Gordon's “exploit to set a precedent, we might have the north road blocked by Scotch nursemaids wheeling their perambulators vigorously towards London”.

This rising sense of derision did not dampen enthusiasm for those who saw a chance to make their own names through the wonder of the wheelbarrow. A race became a craze. The papers of the early months of 1887 are replete with stories of ever more bizarre attempts to emulate Gordon's feat.

First there was Ewing, the Ayrshire wheelbarrow man, dressed conspicuously in red clothes, drawing large crowds as he left Dalry Cross for London in January. Then the first female contender, Mrs M'Gowan of Perth, heading south not with a wheelbarrow but with a perambulator containing her eight-month-old baby, and looking to raise money in light of her husband's unemployment.

Aberdeen men Robert Jamieson and William Strewn were both looking to trundle barrows from there to John O'Groats in February, though Strewn was later reported to have been deceived by a destitute youth and deprived of his barrow, before finding it disbanded. Next, James Sprake, a one-armed man with a specially adapted barrow attached to him via a strap, was readying for a trip from Kirkcaldy to John O'Groats and then down to Land's End. Not long after, John Graham, described in contemporary newspaper coverage as a “cripple”, arrived in Shoreditch from Newcastle, having wheeled a barrow the whole way.

It wasn't just one-way traffic from the north. On 11 February, *The Sporting Life* reported that George Hemmingway, a Billingsgate porter, was intending to travel from Peckham



Hard times A page from an 1886 edition of *The Graphic*, highlighting the plight of London's unemployed. Difficulties in finding conventional work was likely one of the reasons that prompted people to take up wheelbarrowing

to Newcastle, wheeling a load weighing 28lbs. He was also said to have a sweet singing voice, and to be hoping to acquire vocal engagements on his way.

By March, things were getting ridiculous (if they weren't already). James Sanderson, a miner, left Shoreditch, heading north for Morpeth, with a wheelbarrow containing a miner's tub weighing three hundredweight (336lbs). Then there was George Fazzi, a South Shields man, who decided that barrows were for stiff, and instead proposed pushing a coffin mounted on tricycle wheels down the now well-trodden path. As an added twist, the coffin was the one that Fazzi himself intended to be buried in.

In late March, the one-legged wheelbarrowman Robert Cooper set off from Crieff for Edinburgh, but sadly “caused little or no excitement, for the people of Crieff seem to have got tired of this wheelbarrow craze”. Disabled athletes seem to have been particularly attracted to the challenge: in June 1887, Michael Herriot travelled from Cramond Bridge to London and back in 28 days. He had only one arm, and an iron hook attached to his armless sleeve was used in place of the absent limb.

Everyday vagrants?

As the summer progressed, the wheelbarrow mania was dying down, and exponents of the art were finding limited patronage. Michael Herriot's donation box was described as “not burdened regarding its weight”. There was a last hurrah, however. In October, Ewing of Dalry Cross, who you'll recall was one of the first to pick up the barrow baton at the start of the year, was to be found at the top of Ben Nevis, along with two other men, all somehow having wrestled wheelbarrows to the summit.

By my reckoning, there were upwards of 20 people on the roads during that heady spell of wheelbarrow mania. Many had disabilities, and all of them were competing to come up with ever-more elaborate ploys to grab attention from the crowd. Some of the participants were well received – several grand concerts were held in honour of Kirkcaldy wheelbarrowman James Sprake, for instance; others found their efforts ill-rewarded.

So what was this short-lived craze all about? Money was no doubt a driving force. Britain was in the thick of an economic depression, and 1886 and 1887 were years of particularly high unemployment. Most of the wheelbarrowists were clearly very hard-up, so this might have seemed like the only way they could support themselves – particularly for those whose disabilities already limited the types of employment they could take on.

As we've heard, there was a healthy dose of cynicism about the whole enterprise, and perhaps the biggest challenge facing the con-

George Fazzi instead proposed pushing a coffin mounted on tricycle wheels down the now well-trodden path



Wheel deal Britain's original wheelbarrow man, Bob Carlisle, draws a small crowd in Wick, Caithness. The showman's role in the development of the 'sport' was soon forgotten, however

tenders was to show themselves as deserving athletic entrepreneurs rather than everyday vagrants – a dilemma summed up by the *Fife Herald* in February 1887:

“To our own verdant and unsophisticated fancy there is no difference between a tramp plus a wheelbarrow, and a tramp minus a wheelbarrow; except, perhaps, that one is slightly more of a nuisance than the other. The first one comes honestly, although he may have a lie in his mouth – he wants money and he asks it. The other makes a pretence of doing something which shall place him upon a higher level than the common beggar, and, in way, entitles him to the support of the public. But the instinct in both is the same – to get the maximum of hard cash with the minimum of hard work.”

Despite the media saturation and backlash to the wheelbarrow-walking concept, James Gordon continued to be celebrated. He attributed his success to bathing his feet and joints every other day with whisky, but on his return, he was just as happy to bathe in (and profit from) his new-found celebrity. In March 1887, for example, he publicly praised Loy's Liniment for helping with sprains, bruises,

rheumatism and colds, presumably receiving some return from Loy's for the endorsement.

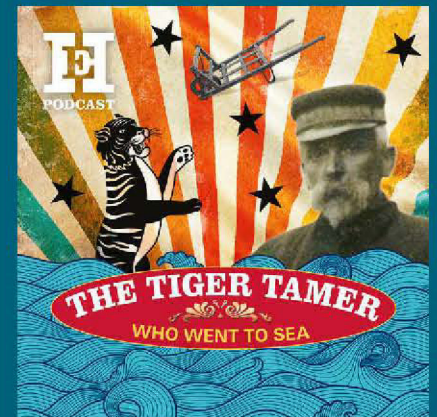
Media manipulation

Gordon was generally feted in the papers as Britain's original wheelbarrow man. But that wasn't strictly accurate. There was another man, Bob Carlisle, who really deserved that epithet. Like Gordon, he was a Scotsman, and in 1879 he had captured a fair dash of media attention himself when he trundled his wheelbarrow from Land's End to John O'Groats and back – an idea inspired by similar wheelbarrow-based challenges in the US. The papers were quick to forget though, and Carlisle – who lived an almost fantastical life combining careers as a clown, lion-tamer, sailor and endurance athlete – was unable to jog their memories because, in 1886, he was on board a ship in the South China Sea.

Carlisle did try to write himself back into the story by penning letters to the papers and engaging in further bouts of endurance, but the damage was done and Gordon continued to be cited as the original wheelbarrowman.

What both men had in common was the ability to manipulate the media to their

LOOK OUT FOR OUR NEW PODCAST SERIES



The story of Bob Carlisle, the sailor and showman credited with being Britain's first wheelbarrow athlete, is the focus of the upcoming HistoryExtra podcast series *The Tiger Tamer Who Went to Sea*. All six episodes will be available to stream from Thursday 22 February at historyextra.com/tiger-tamer-series

advantage. They were active in writing to editors to advise them of their progress, and generally received favourable coverage as a result. So, although the newspapers might have been ramping up the stories, Gordon and Carlisle did their best to make sure they got attention. They would have been the influencers of their day.

According to Edge Hill University's Dr Bob Nicholson, an expert on Victorian newspapers, their strategies worked and journalists played the game: “The press briefly transformed men like Bob Carlisle, Sawdust Jack and James Gordon into national celebrities. As they trundled across the country, newspapers published regular updates on their progress, and readers were drawn into the drama. When a famous pedestrian wheeled his barrow into a new town, he didn't arrive as a stranger, but as a hero.”

A hero James Gordon may briefly have been, but there is a tragic and tawdry coda to the tale. Gordon was convicted of a crime in Dundee in August 1888. The charge? Theft of the wheels and axle of a wheelbarrow. **E**

David Musgrove is content director of HistoryExtra



You can learn more about the Victorian wheelbarrow craze by searching the British Newspaper Archive: britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk. BBC History Magazine readers can get 10 per cent off a subscription to the archive by visiting bit.ly/BNAHIST24

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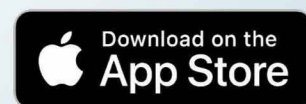
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FIVE THINGS YOU (PROBABLY) DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT...

The Vikings

Ryan Lavelle, who is teaching our new HistoryExtra Academy course, shares five surprising facts about the raiders, pirates and traders from medieval Scandinavia

1 A Viking wedding involved a bed and eight people

The people of medieval Iceland are best known for their sagas – vivid stories written about their Viking ancestors. Yet they also possessed a lawcode, and these laws reveal a curious marriage custom that shines a light on gender relations in Icelandic society.

For a marriage to be legitimate, a groom had to be seen by six witnesses entering the same bed as his new wife, “without concealment”. The idea that marriage was witnessed ensured that children from the union were seen as legitimate – an important matter for the descent of property and for family honour. After all, the keeping of mistresses was far from uncommon and the sexual mistreatment of female slaves so widespread it appears that it was barely worth recording in sagas.

All this is worth bearing in mind when considering the Viking cemetery in Birka, Sweden – in which a skeleton buried with an array of weapons turned out to be biologically female. Many Viking women enjoyed greater freedoms than their counterparts across Europe. But there were still limits to their power. Did the person buried at Birka express their identity like that of a male warrior because of such limits?

This Birka grave contained a biologically female skeleton with an array of weapons



This gold crucifix, discovered on the island of Funen in 2016, suggests that Harald Bluetooth may not have “made all the Danes Christian”

2 Vikings converted to Christianity earlier than we thought

In c965 AD, King Harald Bluetooth made a bold – and striking – claim. On a runestone erected at Jelling on the Jutland peninsula, the Danish monarch declared that he had “made all the Danes Christian”. It was the earliest ‘official’ statement on Christianity made in Viking Scandinavia.

So does that mean that Christianity didn’t gain much traction in the Viking lands until the late 10th century? Perhaps not. For, in 2016, on the Danish

island of Funen, a metal detectorist discovered a Scandinavian gold crucifix pendant from the *early* 10th century.

Two centuries before that, in the early 800s, the Frankish bishop St Anskar led a mission to Scandinavia that, tradition has it, met with little success. The Aunslev crucifix shows that perhaps Anskar’s efforts – or, maybe, the influence of Vikings returning home from Christian lands – bore some fruit after all.



LEFT: A reconstruction of Harald Bluetooth's fortress. The Danish king is depicted (below, on a gilt plate) being baptised

The Vikings is the second topic in our new series of **online courses**. For more details, go to historyextra.com/academy



3 Harald Bluetooth was no friend of the Vikings

Harald Bluetooth is one of the most famous Danish kings of the Viking Age. But it seems that he was anything but a Viking himself. The king – who was named 'Bluetooth' by a 12th-century chronicler, perhaps on account of a bad tooth – never took part in a Viking expedition and ordered no raiding expeditions.

In fact, Harald projected himself as a king of a united Denmark through a series of massive building projects that were designed to repel Viking raiders. These included a network of circular ring fortresses (known as Trelleborg fortresses, after the first

such one to be discovered) that could house many hundreds of soldiers.

Designated by Unesco as world heritage sites in 2023, Trelleborg fortresses were constructed across the territories of Denmark, probably with the aim of bringing the Danish kingdom together – something that Harald Bluetooth claimed on the Jelling runestone.

With such fortresses, as with the Anglo-Saxon burhs of Wessex and Mercia a generation or so earlier, any marauding Vikings could be prevented from wreaking havoc within Harald's realm.

4 The legend of William Tell may derive from a Viking story

Harald Bluetooth's massive building projects were costly, straining relations between the king and his nobles. Saxo Grammaticus, a 12th–13th-century Danish writer, tells that on hearing one of his nobles boast that he was a deadshot with a bow, Harald ordered the man, Toki, to prove it in a way that tested his loyalty to the limits. And so Toki displayed that loyalty by shooting an apple from his son's head. When Harald asked Toki why he had brought more arrows from his quiver, Toki replied that, had he missed the apple, he would not have missed the king.

Whether or not we choose to believe Saxo, his tale reveals to us that saga-like storytelling traditions didn't only hail from Iceland. And Saxo hadn't finished with Harald quite yet.

The Danish writer tells us that the king was driven out of his kingdom by his rebellious son, Swein Forkbeard. Harald's attempt to claim back a foothold in Denmark was, Saxo writes, scuppered when, in a quiet moment in a battle, he headed off into a wood to answer the call of nature. Watching him was Toki, again ready with his bow. Naturally, he did not miss.

Did the legend of William Tell evolve from the story of a 10th-century Danish nobleman?



5 The Viking Age began before the Lindisfarne raids

"Who could have known that such an inroad from the sea could be made?" lamented the Northumbrian churchman Alcuin on hearing the news of the Viking raid on the island monastery of Lindisfarne. That terrible attack, in 793, is widely believed to have fired the starting gun on the Viking Age. But some historians now argue that this era in medieval history may have been under way earlier than that.

The most compelling evidence for this arrived in the early 2000s with the discoveries of two war boats with skeletons at Salme on the Estonian island of Saaremaa. These finds date from around 750.

Archaeologists remain puzzled by the finds, which include Scandinavian weapons, dogs and hawks. Many of the skeletons have revealed extensive evidence of injuries. Was this a diplomatic mission gone wrong (with dogs and hawks intended as gifts?), the fate of unsuccessful raiders, or the burial of a group of would-be settlers? Whatever the case, there's little doubt that, almost a millennium after it drew to a close, the Viking Age continues to throw up surprises. **H**



The Salme ship burials date to c750 AD, four decades before the brutal raid on Lindisfarne

Ryan Lavelle is professor of early medieval history at the University of Winchester

Death and dragons (l to r): Mel Gibson defies the English in 1995's *Braveheart*; the unconventional *Lancelot du Lac* (1974); 1938's "nationalist defensive epic" *Alexander Nevsky*; Charlton Heston and Sophia Loren in 1961's *El Cid*; *The Nibelungs* (1924) centres around the story of a bold, blond dragon-slayer





KNIGHTS! CAMERA! ACTION!

From the heroic glamour of *Henry V* to the heady nationalism of *Braveheart*, the medieval era has proven a rich source of material for film directors.

Robert Bartlett charts Hollywood's long obsession with the Middle Ages

The 1890s turned out to be a significant decade for William Wallace, Richard the Lionheart and Joan of Arc. That's because it witnessed the birth of an art form, one that would present their extraordinary stories to a global audience: the moving picture. The pioneers of this new medium went quickly from single-shot novelty pieces to short narratives, to films an hour or more in length. Mean-

while, thousands of custom-built venues popped up across America, Europe and beyond. In the dying days of the 19th century, a new industry was born.

That industry was greedy for stories, and by the dawn of the 20th century, it was mining many of these tales from the distant past. There has never been a genre of 'medieval film' in the way that there has been of westerns or 'sword-and-sandal' epics like *Ben Hur* or *Gladiator*. But the past 130 years have witnessed a deluge of movies inspired by the Middle Ages. These have been based on real persons or events, such as *El Cid* or *Joan of Arc*; inspired by medieval legends (*King Arthur* and *Robin Hood*); or, if we stretch our definition, have been set in imaginary worlds with medieval features, like *The Lord of the Rings*.

What kind of Middle Ages do these films present to us? The technology of moving pictures may have been new in the 1890s but cinema was marked by the culture into which it was born: late Romantic European nationalism. This is clear both from the music of early cinema ('silent films' were never silent) and from the acting styles of those early films, which borrowed from theatre and opera and often strike modern audiences as melodramatic. It is also evident from the film-makers' assumptions about heroism, nationalism and romantic love.

These characteristics are clear to see in *The Nibelungs* (*Die Nibelungen*), which was released in 1924. Based on medieval German and Scandinavian stories, Fritz Lang's two-part epic tells the story of the tall, blond, dragon-slayer Siegfried; his love for the beautiful Kriemhild; his tragic death; and Kriemhild's revenge. It has a specially composed score (the English premiere took place in the Royal Albert Hall, with the music performed by the London Symphony Orchestra). The actors, most of them experienced stage performers, employ the exaggerated gestures so alien to modern performance. The film's heroic and Germanic tone, and also perhaps the possibly antisemitic characterisation of the villainous dwarf King Alberich, made it a favourite with the Nazi hierarchy. Lang, the director, who was partly of Jewish descent, wisely moved to Hollywood in 1934.

External threats

Many medieval films are marked by a vocal and emphatic nationalism. In *El Cid* (1961) the eponymous hero is fighting "for Spain" (a country that did not exist in the 11th century), while the nationalism in *Braveheart* (1995) was so heady that it was even credited with swinging voters towards the Scottish National Party. The nationalism in these films is defensive, responding to an external threat, which is usually easier to romanticise than wars of conquest. Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* is an exception to this rule, perhaps because it was made in 1944 when an invasion of France could be seen as heroic.



Unsavory admirers *The Nibelungs* (1924) was beloved of the Nazi hierarchy thanks to its Germanic, and possibly antisemitic, tone

Sergei Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) is a classic example of such defensive nationalist epics, as the stern figure of Prince Alexander mobilises the Russian people against the sinister and brutal Germans who are threatening their land. The prince's struggle culminates in the Battle on the Ice, which takes up an amazing 30 minutes of the film, all to a rousing score by Sergei Prokofiev.

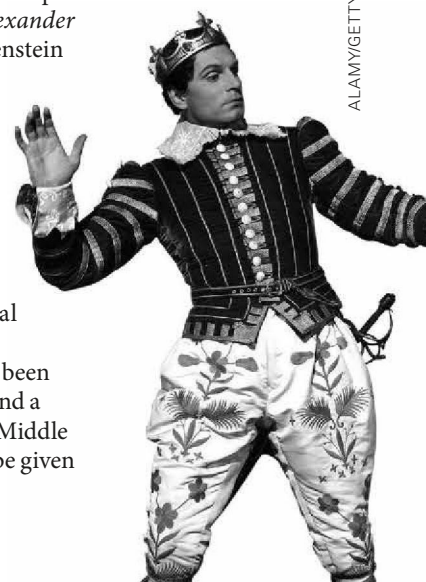
Alexander Nevsky also provides a classic illustration of how cinema history is shaped by politics. The film was made at a moment when the Soviet Union was anxiously aware of the growing threat from Nazi Germany. Its message of victorious patriotic resistance against encroaching Germans answered the propaganda needs of the time and helped earn Eisenstein the Order of Lenin. But this was a period of huge instability and, in August 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a pact that guaranteed peace between their countries and specified which parts of Poland their nations should swallow up.

In the wake of this geopolitical bombshell, *Alexander Nevsky* was withdrawn from circulation and Eisenstein was reassigned to work on a Wagner opera. Less than two years later, however, in June 1941, Stalin was taken by surprise when Germany launched its gigantic invasion of the Soviet Union. Eisenstein's epic was now re-released, and it was not long before an Order of Alexander Nevsky was instituted for heroism on the front. Very few moments in film history show such a definitive correspondence between political events and a film's fortunes.

Another heavyweight medieval topic that has been shaped by modern politics – and never really found a happy treatment in film – is the crusades. In the Middle Ages these enormous military operations could be given

Attack mode

Laurence Olivier played Henry V at a moment in history when an invasion of France could be portrayed as heroic



ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES



Out of the picture The 1922 version of *Robin Hood*, starring Douglas Fairbanks. Many depictions of this story have Richard I away on crusade, without actually showing him there



Narrative fog? Orlando Bloom (right) in *Kingdom of Heaven*, a film in which the distinction between good and evil is blurred

a clear narrative, since most western Christians believed that “God wills it”, as the cry went up when the First Crusade was launched. Knowing that Palestine had been Christian before it became Muslim, medieval chroniclers could depict the crusades as self-defence, as recovery of Christ’s patrimony, and even (in the words of a crusader song) as “a tournament between heaven and hell”.

Film-makers of the 20th and early 21st centuries have chosen not to tread this simple path, since militant Christianity did not appeal to many film-makers and might well be seen as a dubious prospect in attracting viewers. In a remarkable number of medieval films, the crusades function simply as a plot device, removing characters from the scene, presenting their lady-loves with doubts about whether they are alive or dead, and creating the possibility of a longed-for return. Almost every Robin Hood film has King Richard returning from crusade, but few films have him actually on crusade.

Those films that *are* set in the Holy Land tend to take their lead from Walter Scott, who established the historical novel as a major genre in the early 19th century.

Scott’s portrayal of the crusades in his 1825 novel *The Talisman* centred on the relationship between Richard the Lionheart and Saladin, two rulers of different faiths who engaged in warfare against each other but who are linked by common chivalric values.

Over the course of the 20th century, as the Muslim world was decolonised, as militant Islam grew in strength, and as Muslims migrated to the west in greater numbers, film-makers realised that portrayals of the crusades were going to

be yet more difficult, and harder to depict with a clear perspective. Perhaps this explains the narrative fog that surrounds Ridley Scott’s *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005). Here it is not clear who the bad guys are meant to be, what makes the good guys good, or even what is going on. It’s clear that Christian extremists are bad and that Saladin is wise and shrewd (as is traditional). This is not to mention the remarkable scene where the main character (played by Orlando Bloom), freshly arrived from France, teaches the local inhabitants of Palestine how to dig a well.

Love triangles

Many films with medieval settings are based on literature rather than history, and these usually have a much bigger role for women, since the literature of the period often involves love triangles or love dilemmas. Tales of Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot, or Tristan, Isolde and Mark, thus have more in common with the modern bourgeois novel, which is often centred on adultery, than stories of the crusades or national struggles. And, from the point of view of Hollywood, it is an advantage that these stories of knightly valour and romantic love are not tied to any modern nation, and do not skirt dangerously near to issues of western colonialism.

King Arthur films have traditionally been straightforward adventures, with lots of fighting, love interests frustrated but then fulfilled, and plenty of manliness and womanliness. Only in the second half of the 20th century do we see the emergence of ironic, unconventional or critical versions of these tales, such as Robert Bresson’s *Lancelot du Lac* (1974) or John Boorman’s *Excalibur* (1981).

The one film subject absolutely dominated by a woman is the story of Joan of Arc. Starting in the late 1890s, there

Braveheart has been credited with a surge in support for the Scottish National Party

CHESS, PLAGUES AND 'WATERY TARTS'

Five landmark films depicting the Middle Ages

The Seventh Seal (director: Ingmar Bergman, 1957)

This film contains one of the most famous images in cinema history – a knight playing chess with Death on a stony beach. It is the starting point for a journey in which the knight (played by Max von Sydow) travels through a Sweden ravaged by the Black Death, encountering on the way a group of actors, a



witch about to be burned, a jealous blacksmith and a renegade priest. Bergman uses the story to present questions of faith, meaning and religious doubt, while his cinematographer creates arresting images that stay in the mind forever.

El Cid (Anthony Mann, 1961)

A full-blooded three-hour epic, this Hollywood-style treatment of 'Spain's greatest hero' is borne on the broad shoulders of Charlton Heston. It interweaves the historical account of what is known of the 11th-century Castilian warrior, with a much later legendary elaboration about El Cid's relationship with his



wife (played by Sophia Loren). Most remarkable about the film is the way it avoids presenting a simple Christian versus Muslim conflict, instead making a point that Christians and Muslims can live together in loyalty to the nation of Spain.

The Lion in Winter (Anthony Harvey, 1968)

At Christmas 1183, King Henry II and his family gather to quarrel over the succession to the throne. Since about half of all medieval high politics revolved around dynastic disputes, this is no trivial topic, and it is explored with gusto by the stellar cast, including Peter O'Toole as the king, Oscar-winning Katharine Hepburn as his wife, Eleanor (who utters the wonderful line: "It's 1183 and we're barbarians!"), and Anthony



Hopkins as Richard the Lionheart. The film was based on a stage play and, despite occasional outside scenes and action, maintains the intimate claustrophobia of sibling rivalry, father-mother competition and the ageing of the powerful.

Monty Python and the Holy Grail

(Terry Jones and Terry Gilliam, 1975)

The first venture of the comedy troupe into cinema, the film draws knowledgeably on many medieval tropes. Arthurian romance, knightly violence, plague, superstition and filth are all given a characteristically absurdist twist, by exaggeration, anachronism and bathos: peasants argue about "anarcho-syndicalist communes", the Lady of the Lake is described as a

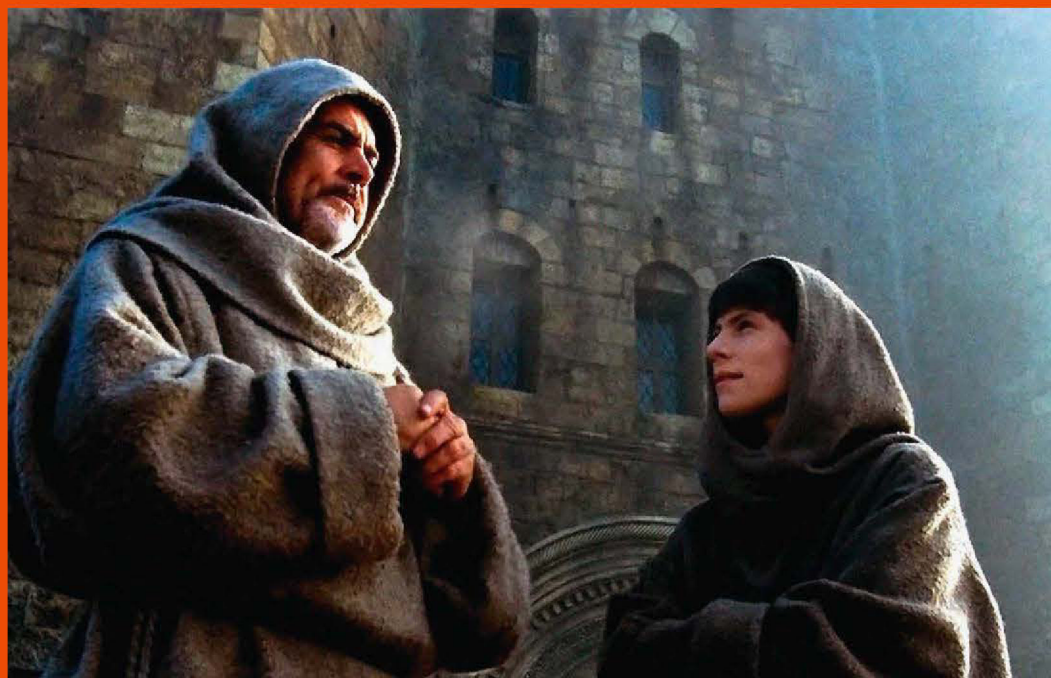


"watery tart", etc. The troupe has been accused of "undergraduate puerility", but the film certainly has its place in the long history of parodic and comic views of the Middle Ages, from *Don Quixote* to *A Knight's Tale*.

The Name of the Rose

(Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1986)

This is an attempt to film Umberto Eco's surprise best-selling novel of the same name, published in Italian in 1980 and English in 1983, which for a while apparently had millions of people reading (or intending to read or pretending to read) about medieval semiotics (sign-theory). The film gutted that for the simpler narrative thread of a murder mystery in a monastery, with Sean Connery as the Sherlock-like friar trying to crack the case. A team of expert advisers were recruited to get the details of 14th-century Italy right, from art-work to gesture.





Deep feelings

Renée Falconetti in the title role of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), which portrayed vividly the intense spirituality and physical brutality of the medieval world

have been countless films about Joan. This is partly because her story is truly remarkable – a peasant girl who inspired the resistance to the English invaders of France and who led “her Dauphin” to be crowned in Rheims, before her capture, trial and, on 30 May 1431, death by fire at the stake. It is also partly because her trial records form one of the richest bodies of reported dialogue to have survived from the Middle Ages, including page after page of Joan’s own words. Entire films have been made based exclusively on these documents.

Not everyone is dazzled by Joan’s charisma. In the final volume of his majestic history of the Hundred Years’ War, Jonathan Sumption plays down her role in the relief of Orléans, the turning point of the war, and writes that subsequently she “inhabited a fantasy world of her own”. Yet film-makers have had little time for such concerns, presenting a character who is inspired and inspiring, who is credibly a teenage girl but can also lead armies.

One of the most memorable cinematic interpretations of Joan is Carl Theodor Dreyer’s 1928 film *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. In many ways it is an austere film. Silent and black-and-white (of course), it concentrates entirely on Joan’s trial and execution, is set in stark interiors, and draws its dialogue from the trial records. Above all, it focuses to an astonishing degree on the faces of the protagonists – the ecclesiastical judges and Joan, played (in what seems to have been her only film role) by Renée (or Marie) Falconetti. The heroine’s face often fills the entire screen, conveying in vivid detail her sense of mission, her doubts and her fears.

In a sense, there is nothing ‘medieval’ about Dreyer’s film. Its greatness (for those who consider it great) lies in the brilliance of the framing, the pacing and the acting. But, on the other hand, its emphasis on intense visionary spirituality, on the power of established religion (not at all the same thing) and on the physical brutality of life, does correspond to important features of the medieval world.

In these respects, *The Passion of Joan of Arc* can be compared with two other

arthouse classics with medieval subjects: Ingmar Bergman’s *Seventh Seal* (1957) and Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Andrei Rublev* (1966). Bergman’s film features a real medieval setting – Sweden during the Black Death – but is populated with entirely fictional characters; Tarkovsky’s movie is based on a real person, the Russian icon painter Andrei Rublev, surrounded by a mixture of real and imagined events. Both films feature central characters who are troubled by religious doubt, men who are making their way through a landscape where they encounter religious fundamentalism and the brutality of power.

Blatant absurdities

A question that is asked of most historical films is: how accurate is it? Medieval historians are sometimes irritated by blatant absurdities, such as the French knights at Agincourt being hoisted onto their horses by cranes, as depicted in Olivier’s *Henry V*, or by the battle of Stirling Bridge in *Braveheart* taking place without a bridge. However, given that medieval historians form but a tiny proportion of cinema audiences, another possible response to this question of accuracy is: does it matter?

I would argue that, in one important respect, it does matter – because divergences from factual accuracy can shine a light on the film-maker’s approach to his or her subject. A perfect example is the romance in *Braveheart* between the Scottish national hero William Wallace, who was executed in 1305, and the French princess Isabella, who was aged nine at the time of his execution. This impossible affair was not a result of simple ignorance on the part of the film-makers but fits into a larger theme of the film: that the struggle between the English and the Scots extended to a conflict over women’s bodies. The trouble starts when the demonic English king, Edward I, allows English lords in Scotland to sleep with brides on their wedding night. In the first resistance raid, a husband whose wife has endured this kills the lord who was responsible. And Wallace is himself stirred to action after English soldiers attempt to rape his wife.

This portrayal of the struggle in sexual terms extends to the main political players. Prince Edward, son of Edward I, cannot satisfy his wife (his notoriously homophobic characterisation drew widespread protest) but William Wallace can, and impregnates her, thus diverting the bloodline of the English monarchy. This is totally absurd. But it’s not a meaningless absurdity. It has a point to make in the world of the film.

As *Braveheart* proves, people should not go to medieval films to learn the history of the Middle Ages. But, when they do go, the chances are that what they watch unfold before them will fire their imaginations and stay with them for the rest of their lives (I have clear memories of watching the battle of Agincourt from *Henry V* as a 10-year-old). It is unclear whether the age of the cinema is over. But the age of the moving image is certainly not. That is how most people will continue to get their picture of the past. **E**

Robert Bartlett is a medievalist who has presented a number of BBC series on the Middle Ages. His most recent book, *The Middle Ages and the Movies*, was published by Reaktion in 2022

No one should go to medieval films to learn the history of the Middle Ages

Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

When did Roman Italy cease to be Roman and become Italian?

►► The first half of this question is relatively simple to answer. Following the sack of Rome by the Visigoth king Alaric in AD 410, Roman Italy began to disintegrate, a process that continued over the next century under the onslaught of repeated invasions of armies from the north. The peninsula then fragmented into numerous independent states, each of which trumpeted their sense of identity by adopting their own currencies, dialects and patron saints.

The answer to the second half of this question can be found by looking at the 15th and 16th centuries, when the rulers of these states revived the artistic traditions of their Roman forebears to create what we now call the Renaissance. This era of great artists and writers, as

well as the first opera, cemented the peninsula's reputation as a centre of cultural excellence and, by 1700, a magnet for wealthy foreign tourists.

Despite this, Italy still did not exist as a country: Venice was the capital of a republic; Naples was a kingdom subject to Spain; Florence was the capital of the grand duchy of Tuscany; and Rome was the capital of the Papal States. As the Austrian statesman Klemens von Metternich remarked in 1814, Italy was merely a "geographical expression".

It was not until 1861 that the principalities agreed to unification, initially under the king of Savoy, though the monarchy was abolished when Italy was declared a republic in 1946.

.....
Mary Hollingsworth, author of *Princes of the Renaissance* (Apollo, 2021)



Dressmakers often stored garments on high wall pegs – as seen in this depiction of an 18th-century French sewing workshop

How did people store clothes before the invention of coat hangers?

►► The first modern coat hanger is said to be an 1869 design for a 'clothes hook', which was filed with the US Patent Office. Previously, the way that garments were stored depended on the type of item and quantity of clothing a person owned: an 18th-century royal would have had dedicated rooms for their fine silks, whereas a typical British family might have owned only a few changes of clothes.

For the latter, a lockable chest, chest of drawers or closet containing shelves and hooks provided the best storage. As resalable assets, it was important to make sure that garments were both clean and secure, especially in shared homes. Storing clothes with herbs repelled insects, while the crisp lines created by folding linen signalled both cleanliness and quality.

Wall pegs also offered temporary places for hanging and airing. Dressmakers used high pegs, turning the clothes inside out and hanging them from the strongly stitched armholes (armholes) to keep them both clean and crease-free.

.....
Emily Taylor, assistant curator of European decorative arts at National Museums Scotland



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What is the earliest surviving legal code?

»» The earliest surviving example is the Sumerian code of Ur-Nammu, which dates from around 2100–2050 BC. The first parts of the code, discovered on a pair of tablets in what is now Iraq, state the laws of King Ur-Nammu, who ruled the southern Mesopotamian kingdom of Ur for roughly 18 years. It is an extraordinarily sophisticated text, and is based on an “If... then” structure (eg “If a man knocks out the tooth of another man, he shall pay two shekels of silver.”)

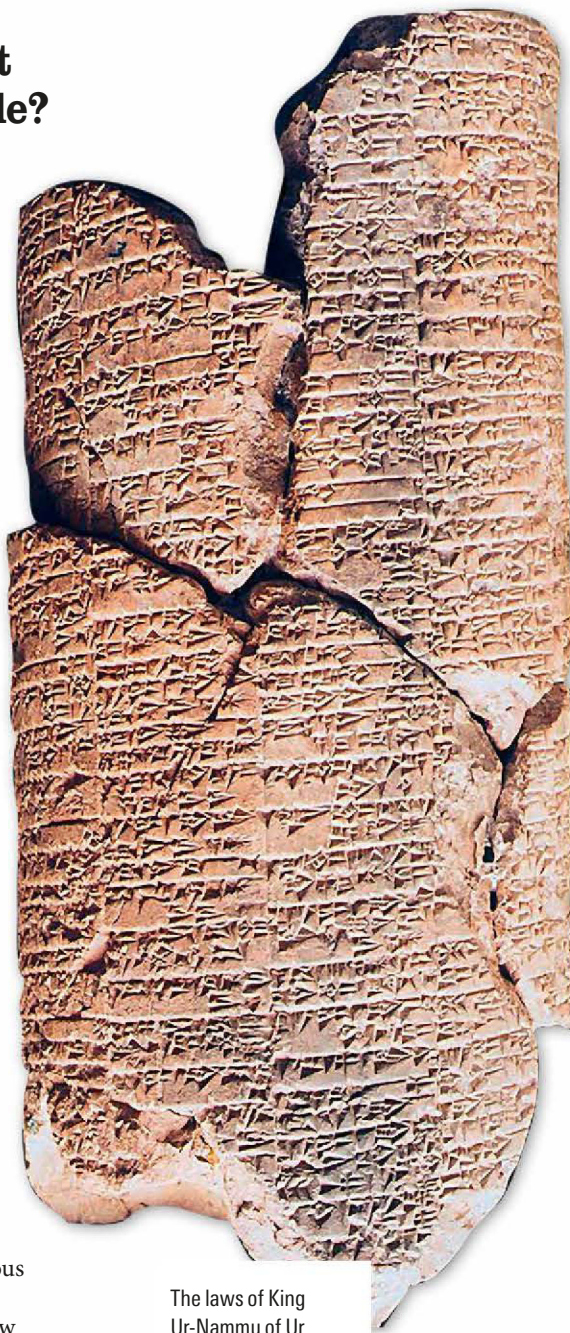
Apart from the crimes of murder, robbery, adultery and rape, which were punishable by death, the code stipulated that most offences should be punished by making the culprits pay the victims financial compensation. Rather than seeking revenge, it was primarily concerned with ‘equity and truth’ and restoring a sense of community.

We know about an even older Sumerian legal code – that of the 24th-century BC ruler Urukagina – via references in other texts, and this, too, is striking due to its focus on tackling corruption. By comparison, the earliest Babylonian legal code, the Code of Hammurabi (c1750 BC), is based on the principle of ‘an eye for an eye’, and is mostly concerned with vengeance.

Overall, law has formed a continuous part of human history, and has often been intertwined with religion. The law of Moses, for example, dates from the 10th to the 6th centuries BC, while the Buddhist Edicts of Ashoka were created around 269–236 BC.

Roman law – the foundation of many modern legal codes – originated as a set of laws known as the Twelve Tables, which were later codified by the emperor Justinian in AD 529–534. Here in the United Kingdom, the modern legal system is rooted in common law, which dates back to the 12th century.

Hannah Skoda, fellow at St John’s College, University of Oxford, and contributor to our *History Behind the Headlines* podcast: historyextra.com/podcast



The laws of King Ur-Nammu of Ur were inscribed on a series of tablets in what is now Iraq

DID YOU KNOW...?

Convict candidate

In 1920, a man named Eugene V Debs ran for the US presidency – despite the fact that he was in prison in Atlanta. Two years earlier, the socialist activist and fierce critic of America’s involvement in the First World War had urged men to avoid the military draft, which led to him being found guilty of sedition and sentenced to 10 years in jail.

When the 1920 election came around, Debs stood for office and ended up winning 3.4 per cent of the popular vote.



Debs ran his 1920 election campaign from behind bars

Greek grease

Athletes in ancient Greece had the sweat and oil removed from their bodies after exercising. Gathered by slaves employing a type of scraper called a *stlengis*, the mixture, known as *gloios*, was sometimes placed in bottles or jars and sold for medicinal purposes. Less athletic individuals would rub it on their own bodies, believing it to be particularly effective in treating muscle pains, sprains and inflamed joints. It was also thought to be helpful in curing genital warts and syphilitic lesions.

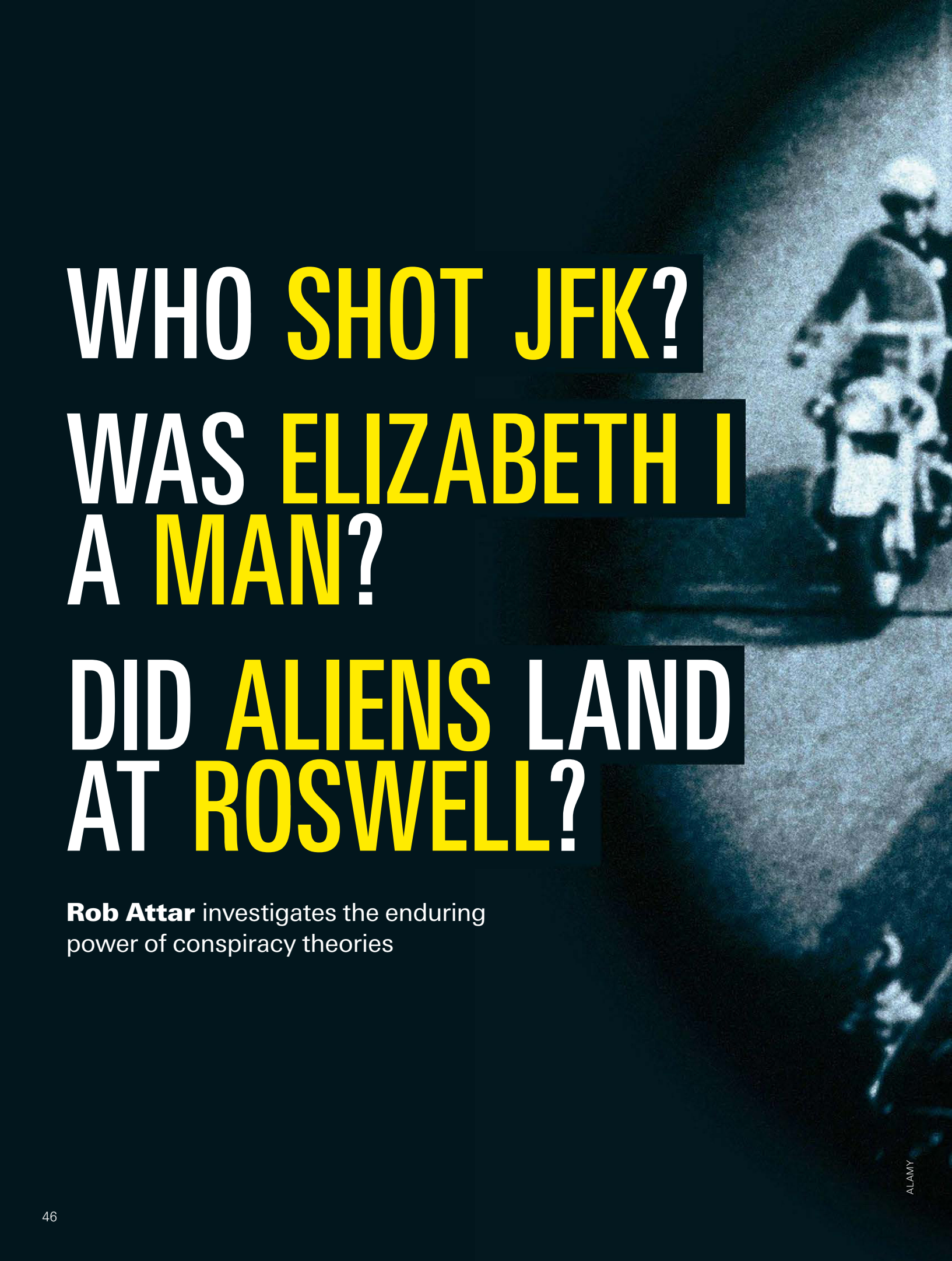
A foggy memory

In 1937, a Christmas Day football match between Chelsea and Charlton Athletic had to be abandoned after a thick fog rolled over the pitch. The players and officials made their way towards the dressing rooms, apart from Charlton goalkeeper Sam Bartram, who stood peering into the pea-souper wondering where the ball was. Fifteen minutes passed before a policeman loomed out of the fog and told him that the match had ended. **H**

Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history



Chelsea’s fog-hit Christmas Day fixture against Charlton was replayed 48 hours later

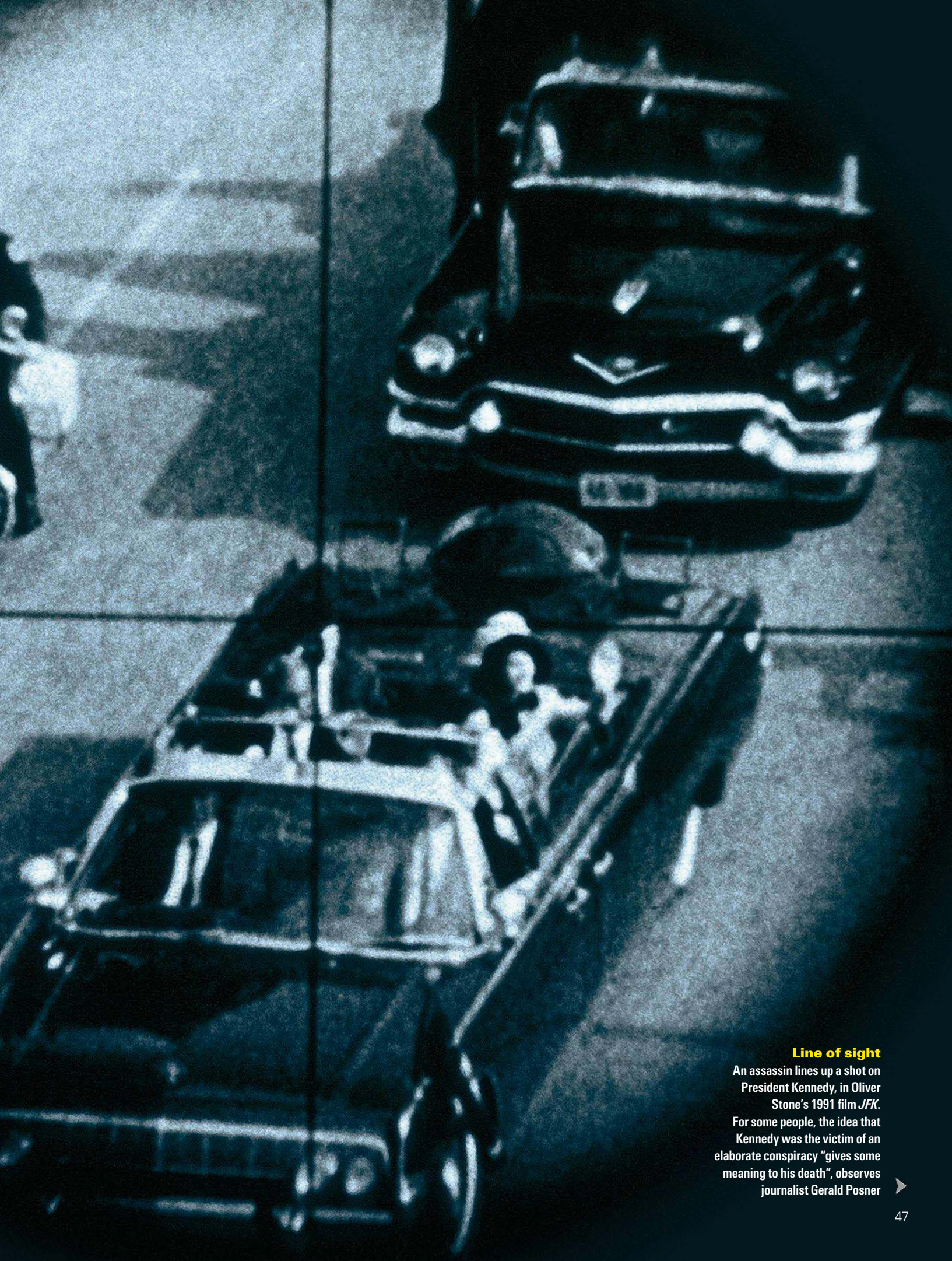


WHO SHOT JFK?

WAS ELIZABETH I
A MAN?

DID ALIENS LAND
AT ROSWELL?

Rob Attar investigates the enduring
power of conspiracy theories



Line of sight

An assassin lines up a shot on President Kennedy, in Oliver Stone's 1991 film *JFK*.

For some people, the idea that Kennedy was the victim of an elaborate conspiracy "gives some meaning to his death", observes journalist Gerald Posner

Conspiracy theories

In March 2020, just as Covid-19 was turning the world upside down, I found myself in Dallas, Texas, in the room where Lee Harvey Oswald had shot and killed President Kennedy almost 60 years earlier. The former Texas School Book Depository has been turned into a museum about Kennedy's life and death, offering a sober, measured

account of the events of November 1963. On the quiet streets outside the museum, however, I encountered a few street stalls, whose occupants were peddling a very different view of the assassination. Here all manner of conspiracies were given full voice, ones that I'm sure you'll all be familiar with: the FBI, or the CIA, or the mafia, or the Soviets, or the Cubans, or some combination of them had undoubtedly orchestrated the killing of the 35th president of the United States.

It might seem that the museum is offering the mainstream view, but according to opinion polls, more Americans believe in some form of conspiracy surrounding the killing of JFK than the official version (as stated by the 1964 Warren Commission) that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. For my new HistoryExtra podcast series *Conspiracy*, I've been exploring this and a number of other conspiracy theories about the past, to try to establish why they are so pervasive in our modern world and whether any of them might actually be true.

One man who wanted to keep an open mind on the Kennedy assassination was the investigative journalist Gerald Posner, whose 1993 book *Case Closed* remains a definitive work in support of the argument that Lee Harvey Oswald did indeed act alone. When I spoke to him, he explained that this was far from his original intention. "Sometimes people will say to me that I must have wanted to just say it was Oswald alone to be a contrarian or whatever else and that I already had my mind made up. And I feel like saying, 'You know nothing at all about journalism.' The greatest story to return with is the story that proves, with credible evidence, that there was a conspiracy in the murder of the president. You want the biggest possible story if you're the journalist. You don't want to come back and say: 'Oh by the way, I think the Warren Commission got some things wrong, but in the end they got the right conclusion.'"

Notorious knoll

As Posner admitted to me, his initial hunch had been that there was some kind of mafia involvement, but over the course of two years of research and hundreds of interviews, he found himself increasingly convinced that there was a single shooter and no conspiracy.

Case Closed lays out Posner's argument in significant detail. But one aspect I was



particularly keen to discuss with him was the so-called 'magic bullet' that is beloved of many conspiracy theorists. For Oswald to have been the sole shooter, then one of the three bullets he is known to have fired must have been responsible for two wounds on President Kennedy and one on Texas governor John Connally, who was travelling in the same car (and survived). If not, then there must have been a second shooter, perhaps on the notorious grassy knoll.

"Oliver Stone, in his film *JFK*, mocked this 'magic bullet' better than anyone," said Posner. "You know, it goes through Kennedy

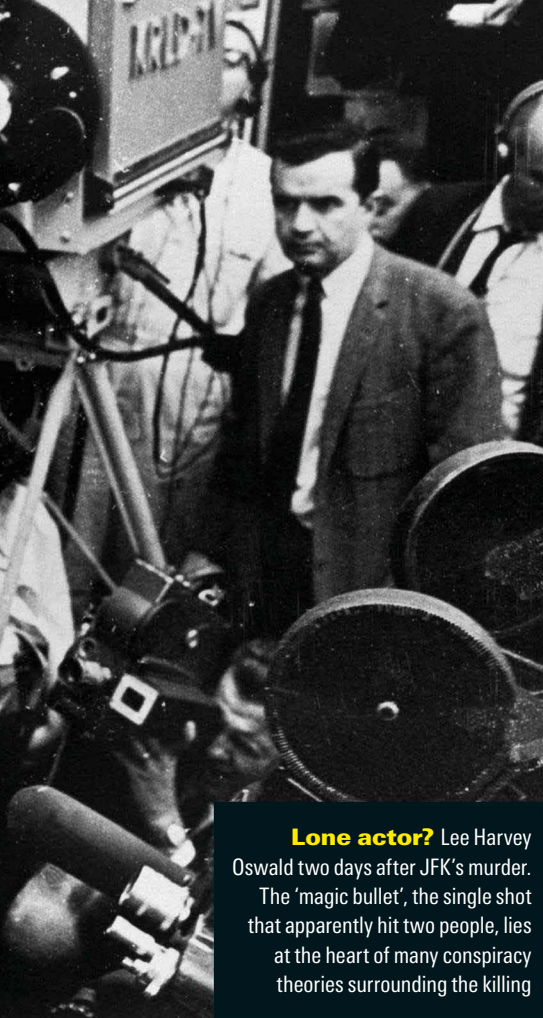
and then hesitates for half a second, then does a couple of somersaults and then makes a left turn and a right turn and goes on to Connally and emerges in very good condition.

"So the question I had when I went to ballistics people in 1992 was: 'Can you do anything that the FBI couldn't do?' And it turns out they could do a lot. If they could disprove the single bullet, if they could prove at that point that it was impossible, then, fantastic, as a journalist, you've got the evidence that there was a conspiracy. You don't know how it happened. You don't know who shot him. You don't know anything else, but if the single bullet didn't happen, there had to be another shooter involved because there are four shots and Oswald didn't have the time for that. So my starting point in essence was that bullet.

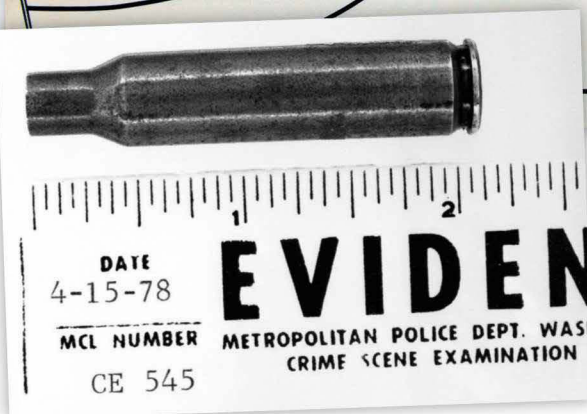
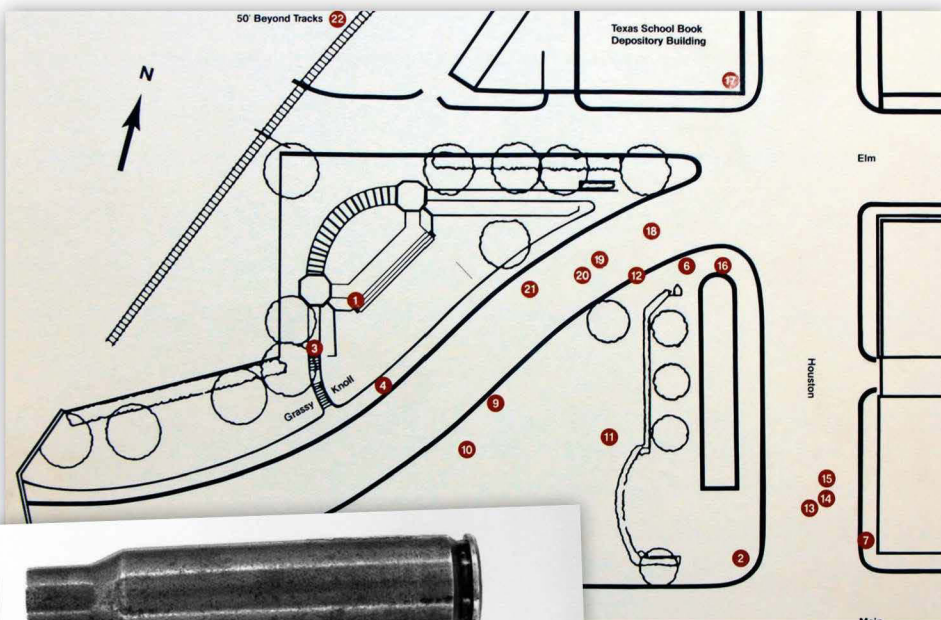
"And the ballistics people said to me: 'We'll tell you why the Warren Commission couldn't figure it out. They had to guess at it and didn't understand how the bullet slowed over a period of time.' They now know the speed at which it was hitting Kennedy and how it tumbled into Connally. And it's not just a theory because they take cadavers the size and weight of Kennedy and Connally and fire bullets at those speeds through them, creating the same wounds. And all day long, they produce equivalent results to the so-called magic bullet. So there is ballistic evidence that that bullet wasn't so magical. It did in fact happen."

As Posner was at pains to explain to me,

More Americans believe in some form of conspiracy surrounding the killing of JFK than the official version



Lone actor? Lee Harvey Oswald two days after JFK's murder. The 'magic bullet', the single shot that apparently hit two people, lies at the heart of many conspiracy theories surrounding the killing



Scene of the crime

A street map showing key locations in Kennedy's murder, and (inset) a cartridge case found in the Texas School Book Depository from where Oswald fired on the president

the ballistics evidence does not discount the possibility of a conspiracy. It only means that there didn't need to be a conspiracy to explain the wounds on the president. And ultimately, he accepts that despite the title of his book, this is one debate that's unlikely to ever be settled.

Real-world consequences

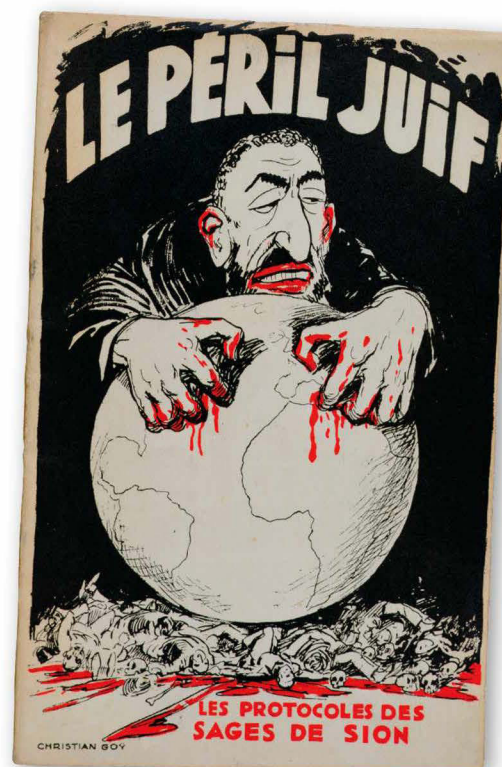
But while some conspiracy theories might never be disproven, others remain stubbornly persistent, despite being repeatedly shown to be false. A case in point is the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. First serialised in a St Petersburg newspaper in 1903, it purported to be the minutes of a meeting of Jewish leaders, revealing their plans to rule the world by duplicitous means. In fact, the text was partially an adaptation of an 1864 French satirical novel, that originally had nothing to do with Jews. The *Protocols* were debunked by *The Times* in the 1920s, and in 1935 a Swiss judge ruled that they were a fake after the distributors in Switzerland had been sued by the Jewish community in the country. And yet the conspiracy theories have persisted.

"Even when they have proven to be an outright forgery, a fiction, the *Protocols* continue to circulate widely today," says Professor Pamela S Nadell of the American University in Washington, DC. "There is no evidence that the Jews do the things that they say in the *Protocols* but somehow that doesn't gain any traction."

This is a conspiracy theory that has had serious real-world consequences. "Hitler's writings were definitely drawn from *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*," says Nadell. "He's blaming the Jews. He's talking about international Jewish world finance. This is a conspiracy theory that helped to fuel the Holocaust." And in more recent times the *Protocols* have retained their invidious power, as Nadell explained to me.

"They have proliferated around the world so much," she says. "They were published in Japan in 2004. They certainly made their way across the Arab world and in 2002 Egyptian satellite television developed a 41-part miniseries that was based on the *Protocols*. Then, in March 2021 an officer of the Capitol Police at the United States Capitol in Washington, DC was found with a copy of the *Protocols* near his security post. So the text remains. It's potent today, widely available and still used."

Even conspiracy theories that seem much less serious can have negative consequences today. One example is the bizarre case of the Bisley boy. According to this theory, in around 1542 the future Queen Elizabeth I was staying in the Cotswolds village of Bisley where she fell ill and died. Rather than reveal this tragedy, her panicked attendants searched for a local lookalike who could be substituted for the deceased princess. As it transpired the closest match was a young boy who then spent the rest of his life masquerading as Elizabeth,



A c1940 cover of a French version of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Despite being debunked repeatedly, this antisemitic text outlining a Jewish plot for global domination remains stubbornly persistent

Conspiracy theories

providing a handy explanation as to why the queen never married or had children.

It's a deeply strange story that quickly fades under scrutiny – Henry VIII would surely have noticed if his daughter had returned from the Cotswolds as a small boy – but has had many adherents, notably *Dracula* author Bram Stoker who included it in his 1910 book *Famous Impostors*. And as Tudor historian Tracy Borman explained to me, it points to sexist attitudes that dogged Elizabeth's age and more recent times.

"I think it takes to extremes the misogyny that Elizabeth herself had had to deal with. This idea that she was 'just a woman' and yet was mistress of a kingdom and of an empire. The theory provides a perfect explanation as to how there was a highly competent woman outfoxing her male contemporaries.

"Bram Stoker was writing at the crossover between the reigns of Edward VII and George V, so we're talking about the early 20th century – and it's still being spouted and repeated now. I still get asked about it. People are talking about it to this day."

But are all conspiracy theories intrinsically harmful? Not according to Dr David Clarke of Sheffield Hallam University, who I interviewed about the infamous Roswell incident. Several opinion polls have shown that a large proportion of Americans believe their own government is hiding evidence of extra-terrestrial life from them, and by far the best-known 'evidence' for this is the craft (actually a military balloon) that crashed in

Extra-terrestrial?

The remains of an object that crashed to earth near Roswell, 1947. Polls show that a large proportion of Americans believe their government is hiding evidence of alien activity from them



Roswell, New Mexico in 1947, fuelling stories of a downed UFO and even autopsies being carried out on alien life-forms.

"There have been various studies done of conspiracy theories and a recent one said that of all of the ones they looked at, Roswell is actually the most harmless," Clarke told me. For him, the theory acts as a kind of modern folklore. "It's a modern myth in the same way that the Greeks had their myths. This is a technological myth for the Cold War era. And I don't think it's a bad myth; it's a good one, unlike some of the other, nasty, conspiracy theories. People are looking for salvation from somewhere and it's a comforting thought that out there in the cold dead universe there is someone who is interested in us and that we're not alone. So out of all the conspiracy theories and myths, this is probably the most positive one of all."

Hollywood material

One question I kept returning to was 'Why?' Despite all the evidence against them and the cohorts of historians lining up in opposition, why are these conspiracy theories so hard to dislodge? Popular culture seems to have a lot to answer for. Conspiracy theories are beloved of authors and filmmakers, from Oliver Stone's *JFK* and *The X-Files*, to Bram

Stoker's *Famous Impostors* and the hundreds of books by less-illustrious writers dedicated to one theory or another. Of course, in more recent times, the internet and social media have added enormous fuel to this fire, enabling conspiracy theories to be disseminated quickly and easily and like-minded people to form networks across the globe.

Medieval historian Steve Tibble believes that all this goes a long way to explain the popularity of the many conspiracy theories

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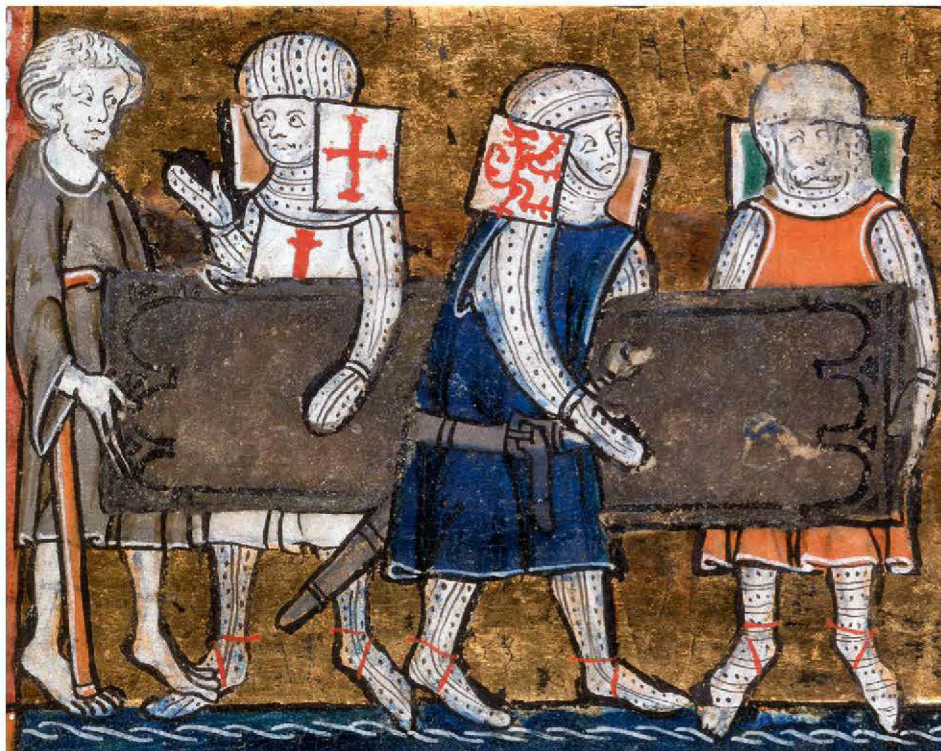
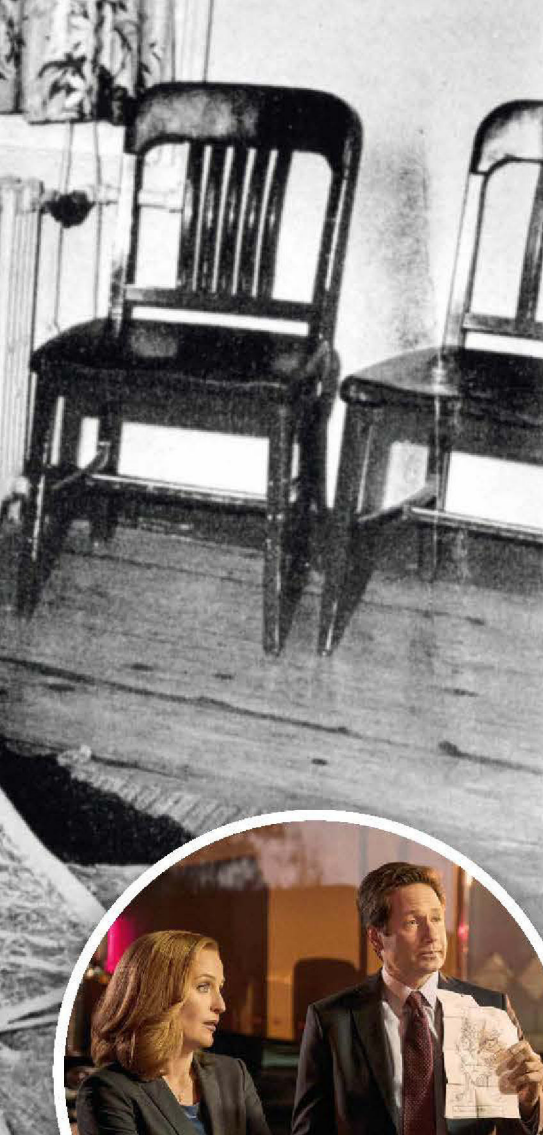


Rob Attar joined a range of experts to investigate six of history's most pervasive conspiracy theories for series two of the HistoryExtra podcast *Conspiracy*. BBC History Magazine subscribers can listen to the whole series ad-free at: historyextra.com/conspiracies-series



Social media has enabled conspiracy theories to spread rapidly and like-minded people to form global networks

TOPFOTO



Hide and seek Knights carry the Holy Grail in a 14th-century manuscript. The Grail makes frequent appearances in Templar conspiracy theories



Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny in *The X-Files*. Conspiracy theories have provided popular culture with a rich seam of material for centuries

surrounding the Knights Templar, which range from them hiding the Holy Grail to discovering America.

"Templar conspiracies are fun and people love prurient stories," he says. "The Templars and their conspiracy theories were the tabloid material of the Middle Ages and they gained a life of their own. More recently we had the growth of the internet and also low budget TV documentaries and podcasts so there's a lot more scope to build up content about them. But this is not just a 21st-century phenomenon. Pretty much the same thing happened in the early 19th century with the invention of the cheap novel. Walter Scott has a lot to answer for because of the way he positioned the Templars as larger than life pantomime villains in his book [1819's *Ivanhoe*]."

While some conspiracy theories have entertained the masses, others have helped people to make sense of seemingly

unfathomable events. That's the contention of Steve Twomey, an expert on the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, which is often alleged to have been deliberately engineered by President Roosevelt as a way to sneak the US into the war against Nazi Germany. "The American people had been told again and again that their navy was the best in the world and that Pearl Harbor was an incredible fortress," he told me. "Meanwhile, the Japanese had been repeatedly described to the American public as an inferior military power, and yet suddenly here were these supposedly inferior people surprising the best navy in the world at Pearl Harbor. How could that have happened? Well, it was a conspiracy – that's how. The only explanation that made sense for what happened was some sort of plot."

Climate of suspicion

Of course, as events such as Watergate show, conspiracies can happen, and the misbehaviour of governments and other organisations has undoubtedly added to the climate of suspicion in which conspiracy theories flourish. As Twomey says, scepticism is not a bad thing in itself, "it's just unhealthy when it goes to an unreasonable level".

This idea of explaining the unexplainable was also cited by Gerald Posner in the story of the JFK conspiracy theories. At the end of our interview, he highlighted a point made by the historian William Manchester in his book *Death of a President*, that helped him to understand the mindset of a Kennedy conspiracy

theorist. "Manchester looked back at the Second World War and he said if you think about the Holocaust you've got 6 million Jewish victims as well as millions of political victims and those who were killed because they were gay or prisoners of war etc. At the other side of the equation you have the Nazis and they sort of balance each other out: worst crime, worst criminals.

"But in the Kennedy assassination you have this young charismatic president with so much potential for the future. We were literally living in Technicolor and it was cut down in Dallas by a bullet from a sniper – this 24-year-old sociopathic loser, Lee Harvey Oswald. It doesn't balance out. You want to instinctively put something heavier on the Oswald side. Kennedy was killed because the CIA had to stop him from disbanding the agency, or the military had to stop him so he didn't pull out of Vietnam, or the Cubans because he was going to kill Fidel Castro.

"It doesn't make you feel better that he's dead but it gives some meaning to his death. People want to believe that there has to be a more elaborate, complex and hidden truth behind the simpler explanation." **H**

Rob Attar is editor of *BBC History Magazine*

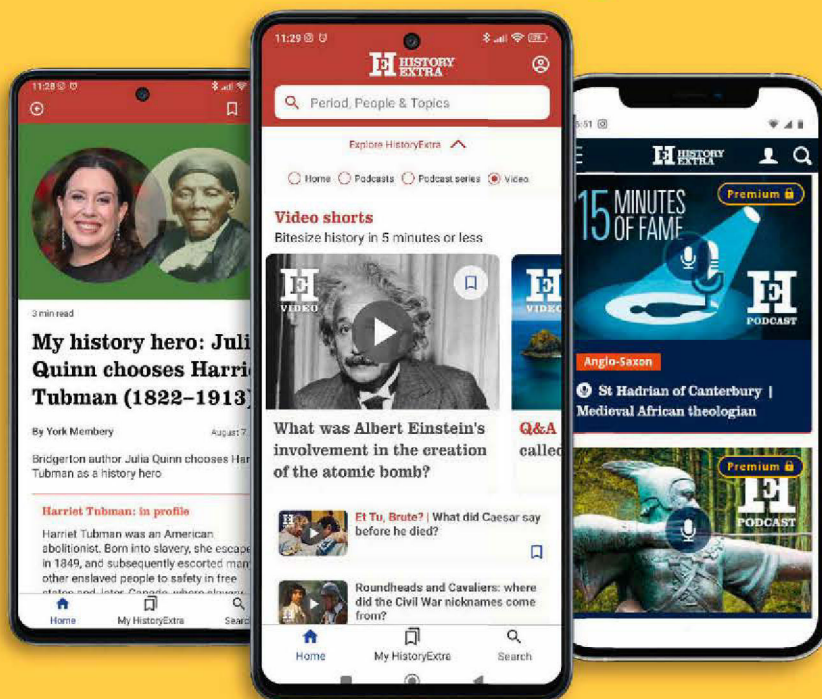


You can listen to the BBC World Service **Witness History** episode on the Roswell incident at: bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p056y93v

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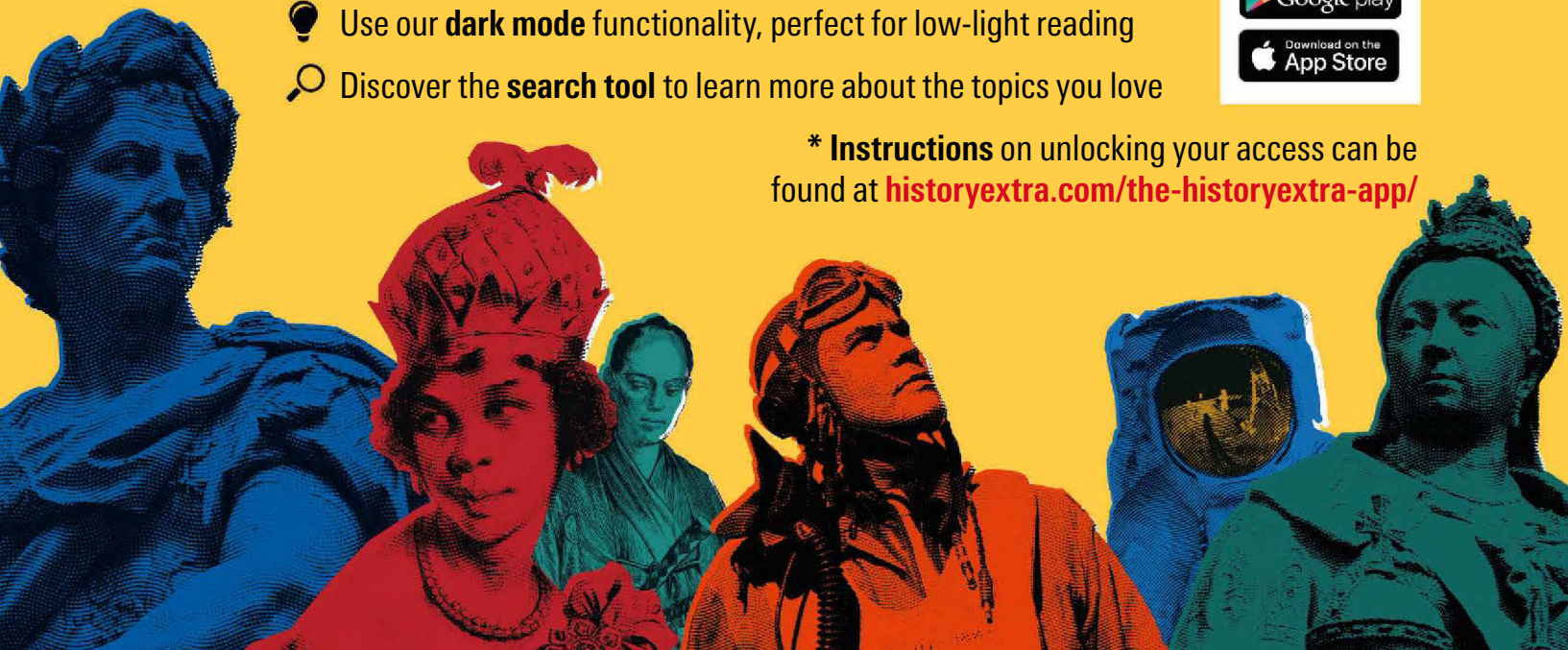
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Calcuttans queue for food at the height of the Bengal famine, October 1943. At least 3 million people are now believed to have died as a result of the crisis

// People began collapsing in the streets and dying on the pavements //



In 1943, a devastating famine claimed the lives of millions of people in the Indian province of Bengal. **Kavita Puri** (left) tells us why she's keen to ensure that the stories of those who endured the crisis are not forgotten

INTERVIEW BY **MATT ELTON**

Accompanies the series **Three Million** on BBC Radio 4



**Living through Partition**

Kavita Puri charted India's postwar upheavals on our podcast: historyextra.com/membership/living-through-partition



Matt Elton Your new radio series explores the 1943 Bengal famine, which is a subject that's both unfamiliar to a lot of people and the source of ongoing controversy. Can you give us a sense of the famine's scope and significance?

Kavita Puri The numbers are just huge. In 1943, as the Second World War was raging, a famine occurred in Bengal [a region now split between Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal]. Low estimates are about 1.5 million deaths, with that figure going as high as 6 or 7 million. Although there's long been debate about its full extent, there is a consensus among academics that the death toll was at least 3 million. To put that in context, it's one of the largest losses of civilian life suffered on the Allied side – and yet this is a subject that's largely unknown in Britain. Even in India and Bangladesh, remembrance is complicated.

There is a lot of academic literature on the causes, and the most important contributors to the famine are widely debated, as well as questions of culpability. My purpose was very different. I wanted to understand why this subject has become largely overlooked, and its memory fraught, and to try to shift the lens to look at the humanitarian catastrophe in a different way by focusing on individuals who survived and lived through the famine. More than 80 years on, that generation – like the war generation – will soon no longer be with us. This is really the last chance to capture their voices. So I set out to do that, and to explore archives around the world for first-hand testimonies.

What do we need to understand about Britain and India and their relationship to make sense of what happened?

The British had been in India for hundreds of years by the time of the Second World War, and had direct control over it from 1858 onwards. But, by the outbreak of the conflict in 1939, a strong Indian nationalist movement had emerged – and many of its leaders were unhappy when Britain declared war on Germany, and did so on behalf of India. Calls for independence grew louder and louder, and so the relationship between Indian nationalists and Britain had become increasingly fractious.

In the early years of the war, what were the consequences of India being pulled into the conflict?

After the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Japanese forces rapidly moved through south-east Asia. In February 1942, Singapore – a major British military stronghold – fell, and Rangoon fell the following month. Japanese troops were perilously close to the border of British India. Hundreds of thousands of Allied soldiers descended on Calcutta (now Kolkata) to fight on the Asian front. Labourers also arrived in large numbers to work in wartime industries, putting pressure on food resources. The colonial government was also printing money to pay for these extra resources, and inflation was very high.

Rice was the staple food in Bengal, but for millions already struggling to survive, the increase in its price had a devastating impact. Rice imports from Burma halted after the Japanese occupation, putting more pressure on the rice supply. Fearing a Japanese invasion, colonial authorities then carried out what became known as the 'denial policy'. Having seen the way Japanese troops were aided by taking local food and boats in their advance across south-east Asia, authorities decided to confiscate those surplus resources from villages around the Bengal Delta. This affected the already fragile local economy, making it harder to transport rice around the region. The price of rice rose further, and it was often hoarded for profit.

Some of the stories in the series about the impact this had are incredibly moving. Are there any that shed particularly vivid light on the wider issues?

I found first-hand stories of people in the countryside who were forced to make incredibly difficult decisions. Some women resorted to desperate measures such as turning to prostitution or selling their children for rice. One man was, at the time of the famine, living in Midnapore, a district in Bengal that had been affected by the denial policy. The area was then hit by a devastating cyclone in October 1942, which destroyed rice crops, flattened homes, and killed many people. Prices spiralled in its wake, and he could no longer afford to buy rice in the market. Once his family's reserves ran out, he became one of the many thousands to travel to the major cities hoping for aid.

But there are also the stories of observers – the people who saw all of this happening as the situation got increasingly worse during 1943. I spoke to eyewitnesses who were very moved by the scenes that were unfolding around them. One woman talked of being unable to sleep because of the sight of all the dead in Calcutta, and the vultures picking at their bodies. She is 97 now, but that memory is still so vivid to her.

And every single Bengali person I spoke to remembered one specific phrase: *phan dao*. This was the plea uttered by starving people asking not for rice, but for the starch water around it. They didn't even think it was worth asking for the rice itself. That's a collective memory that has been passed down through the generations.

I've listened to your new radio series, and another line stood out for me: "People who flocked to Calcutta died strangers in the city they thought would help them... but yet publicly, nobody was calling this a famine." Was it this migration into the cities that finally forced people to recognise what was happening?

The impact of the famine was felt most in the countryside, where it was sufficiently out of sight that it was possible for people to not know the full extent of what was going on. It wasn't really until the mass exodus of people from the countryside started in earnest from May 1943 onward – and people began arriving in the cities, collapsing on the streets



Japanese propagandists air-dropped leaflets into India contrasting images of famine with an idyllic future outside the British empire



The human cost
A family of famine victims in Calcutta, November 1943. Vast numbers of people travelled to the city from rural areas in desperate search of food

and dying on the pavements – that its effects became visible for all to see. Yet even that didn't mean that this story could be reported, because the word 'famine' was censored by the emergency rules put in place by the colonial government during the war. The British didn't want the Japanese to use the existence of famine as propaganda, or as a way of recruiting Indian troops.

Who were the key figures in bringing the horrors of the famine to a wider audience?

Indian writers, artists and photographers were trying to document what was happening. The well-known artist and author Chittaprosad Bhattacharya, for instance, drew ink sketches of some of the victims, to which he added their names (if he knew them) and brief biographies. The results are shattering, but give us a real sense of who the people were and where they were from. Chittaprosad's *Hungry Bengal*, a collection of these sketches, came out in November 1943. There were 5,000 copies, and nearly all were confiscated by the British.

Another key figure was Ian Stephens, editor of the widely read, and well regarded, British-owned Indian newspaper *The Statesman*. He had been toeing the line and not reporting what was going on, but wrestling with his conscience as a result. By the summer of 1943, as reports started to flood in from the countryside and it became clear

// People asked not for rice, but for the starch water around it. They didn't think it was worth asking for the rice itself //



A man and his granddaughter look across a rice field in West Bengal, 1943. The crop's availability was affected by a combination of natural and man-made factors

what was happening in Calcutta, where he lived, he decided to do something. While he could not mention the word 'famine' in his paper, there was nothing in the rules about the use of images. So, on 22 August 1943, Stephens published shocking photographs of some of the people who were desperately suffering on Calcutta's streets. The result was what we'd call 'going viral': the images were seen by people first in Calcutta, then in Delhi, and then around the world. The famine's existence was becoming harder to deny.

Can you give us a sense of how strong the level of censorship was and the impact of these reports?

The colonial press adviser was keeping a close watch on what was being reported. But as the images in *The Statesman* were picked up by newspapers elsewhere in the world, including in Britain and the US, it became harder and harder to suppress what was going on. And Stephens grew bolder over the next two months, and began writing editorials that were actively critical of the governments in Calcutta and Delhi. By September, he'd gone as far as to call it a man-made famine.

You also uncovered a set of microcassettes featuring some extraordinary recordings. Can you tell us about those?

I was doing some research at the University of Cambridge, and the head archivist – who

I've worked with in the past – said, well, you might want to take a look at these. And there on the desk were about a dozen tiny tapes of the kind I haven't seen for a couple of decades. They turned out to feature recordings of interviews, carried out in the 1980s, with Indian civil servants who had been working in districts across Bengal at the time of the famine. These civil servants were travelling around the province carrying out the 'famine code': a set of indicators drawn up in the late 19th century that were supposed to determine whether or not a situation could be deemed a famine. The tapes paint a fascinating picture of the colonial chain of command, and historians who I spoke to about the cache and its contents were very excited.

What was the response in London when these reports started filtering out?

Viceroy Linlithgow, the most important colonial figure in India, contacted London in December 1942 to express his concerns about the food crisis. He was talking at that point about India as a whole, rather than Bengal specifically, and some food was sent to the north-west of the country – but, in return, Bengal was asked to export more rice for the wider war effort.

By the time that the crisis had reached its height, around August 1943, Linlithgow warned of famine conditions in Bengal and asked for significant food imports. At that point, Britain was part of the Allied invasion of Sicily, and there were plans for a campaign in Italy. The war cabinet said it could only promise a fraction of what Linlithgow had asked for. But once the new viceroy, Lord Wavell, was appointed by Winston Churchill in 1943, he visited the famine-stricken province – unlike his predecessor. Wavell began asking the war cabinet for around a million tonnes of food imports to urgently alleviate the humanitarian situation and, by the end of 1944, his request was fulfilled.

At the start of the series, you note that this is a scary subject to be wading into. Why do you think the famine, and particularly the response of Churchill's government, have become such fraught topics? I think it's partly because we in Britain have a view of our war story, and the famine does not fit neatly into that narrative. Churchill is a national hero who fought courageously against fascism, but there are difficult questions to be asked: did he and his war cabinet do enough to alleviate the famine

New supplies

Children gather to collect rice from trains in Calcutta, 1943. Towards the end of that year, food started to be brought into the city from outside Bengal, rather than from the surrounding countryside



once they knew of its severity? Could more shipping have been released to allow for more food aid in the middle of the war, when they were fighting on many fronts? The language Churchill used about Indians – documented, for instance, in the diaries of Leo Amery, secretary of state for India – is uncomfortable, and some have raised the question of whether his views affected his response. Debate over all of this, however, has obscured other discussions, and has perhaps led to the human stories I wanted to focus on being overlooked.

Do we need to consider any other factors that shaped the famine response?

Lord Wavell's arrival as viceroy in October 1943 did significantly accelerate relief efforts. Immediately after visiting Calcutta and surrounding districts, including Midnapore, he ensured that Calcutta would be fed from supplies taken from outside of the province rather than from the surrounding countryside in Bengal. He set up relief hospitals and gruel kitchens, and military units were redirected from going to the front to help with relief efforts. He also argued strongly with London that it should send large amounts of food aid in order to stave off another famine in Bengal.

It's interesting that you argue that some narratives and experiences have been overlooked. What efforts are being made to redress the balance?

Not many, sadly. I've worked previously on the subject of the 1947 Partition of India [in which British India was divided into the two independent dominions of India and Pakistan] for instance, and that's now



Viceroy Linlithgow pictured at his desk. His requests relating to food shortages in India led to more supplies being sent to the north-west of the country – but Bengal was also asked to export more rice

// There isn't a plaque, a memorial or a museum anywhere in the world to people who died in the famine //



Relief effort

Lord Wavell (standing, in dark-coloured hat) at a famine relief kitchen. His appointment as viceroy of India saw a drastic improvement in aid efforts

a very different story. There are citizen archives in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in which testimonies are being preserved, and that's happening in a smaller way in the diaspora too.

That just isn't the case for the Bengal famine. One of my interviewees said, strikingly, that they thought the collective memory of the famine isn't really held by the people who lived through it, but instead by those who observed it. That really changes how this story has been told.

I did track down one man who is travelling around the Bengal countryside with pen and paper, trying to record the testimony of the last remaining survivors. And I wanted to interview survivors myself, too, but couldn't get a journalist visa to go to India. I hope that changes, because it's so important for the historical archive that these stories are preserved alongside the official archive. I mentioned at the start that at least 3 million people are believed to have died. Behind that statistic are 3 million stories – and that doesn't even include the experiences of so many more people who survived and had to live with the famine's consequences.

When I was doing my research into partition, 70 years had passed since that event, and as I mentioned earlier we are now more than 80 years on from the famine.

I think, in some ways, we are already too late: just as there are very few people left with a good enough memory of the Second World War, there are very few people left alive who are healthy enough to recount this history. I feel really sad that it's now almost too late to collect these testimonies in a significant way.

You also mention that, for a subject so freighted in controversy, it's strangely also one about which very little is known – particularly in Britain. Why do you think that's the case?

It's not surprising that's the case in Britain because, as we've discussed, this is a difficult episode in colonial history and affects the way in which we tell our war story. But I find it really interesting that the stories of those who died are also not well-remembered in India and Bangladesh. There isn't a plaque or a museum to them anywhere in the world. The famine is remembered through photographs and sketches and films, but there's no dedicated archive or memorial.

One of the reasons for this, I think, is that the 1940s was such a tumultuous time in India (and later East Pakistan) more generally, that somehow the memory of the victims of this extraordinary, horrific event has been eclipsed.

How would you like your series to change the way people look at the famine?

There is a lot of academic work on the subject, from a range of different disciplines – this is, after all, a hugely complex subject. Historians and other researchers are making extraordinary discoveries all the time. Unfortunately, I didn't have enough room in my series to include all of the new work that is being done. My hope is that these stories – not just of those who made the decisions, but of the lived experiences in all of their complexity – are brought to the foreground over the next decade. And the work I've done for the series is just a start: I found so much testimony I couldn't use.

I hope that, by shifting the perspective slightly, I can show that discussion of the famine doesn't have to be fractious. Surely, 80 years on, we should be able to have healthy, civil discussions about these kinds of episodes from our past. **H**

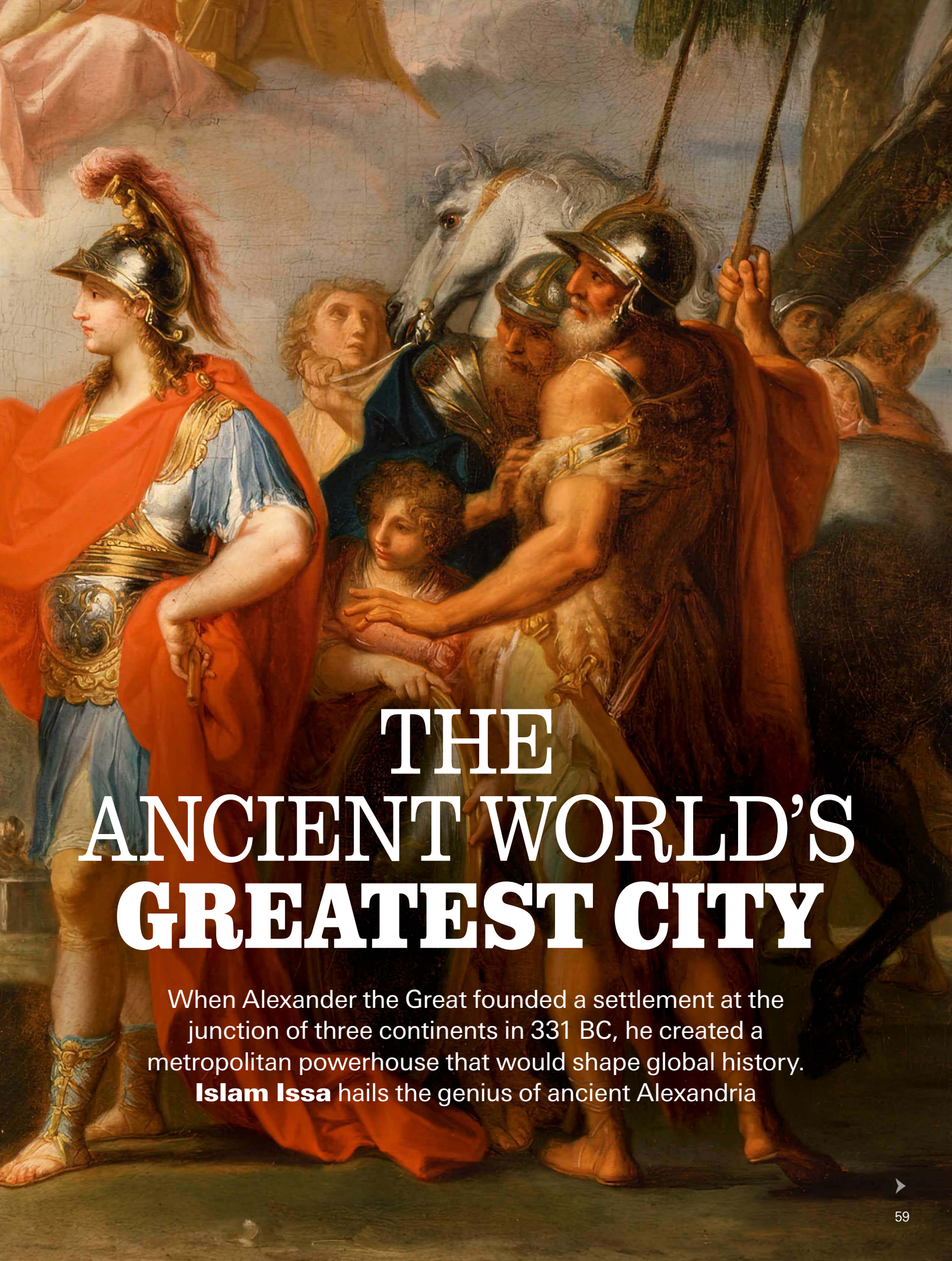
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Kavita Puri is a journalist and broadcaster for BBC Radio 4. She also writes the monthly *Hidden Histories* column in *BBC History Magazine*

Three Million is available on BBC Sounds from Friday 23 February, BBC Radio 4 on 25 February and BBC World Service English on 2 March



Urban planner Alexander the Great is shown founding Alexandria in an 18th-century painting. Within a matter of decades, the city had become *the* global capital of trade and knowledge





THE ANCIENT WORLD'S GREATEST CITY

When Alexander the Great founded a settlement at the junction of three continents in 331 BC, he created a metropolitan powerhouse that would shape global history.

Islam Issa hails the genius of ancient Alexandria

The genius of Alexandria

When the Macedonian king Alexander the Great arrived at the barren island of Pharos in 331 BC, he was still in his mid-twenties

and barely five years into his reign. The ambitious young warrior had been drawn to this spot on Egypt's Mediterranean shore after reading about it in the epic poetry of Homer, most revered of the ancient Greek writers. A lover of literature, Alexander had even styled his hair in long locks to emulate Homer's hero, Achilles.

What he found was a tiny, lifeless island facing a series of small fishing villages scattered across a windswept coast. A few miles to the south on the mainland spread a vast freshwater lake, around which the

ancient Egyptians had constructed a canal network.

In his unceasing quest for world domination, this was just the location for which Alexander had long searched – at the intersection of Africa, Europe and Asia. And when he arrived at this strategic hotspot, he dropped to his knees in a state of ecstasy and began scattering barley across the sandy ground, roughly designing the layout of what would soon become the world's first modern city – a magnificent capital that would change the course of history. Named in honour of its founder, Alexandria was established that very same year, with a causeway measuring seven stadia (around 1.2km) built to connect Pharos to the coast.

Alexander himself was soon on his way eastward in search of his next adventure; he didn't even wait to watch his new city being

High light The jewel in Alexandria's crown, the Pharos Lighthouse, shown in a 16th-century engraving. When it was completed in the third century BC, the lighthouse was one of the tallest man-made buildings in the world



built. But its fate was now set, associated with a founding myth and a living hero, and with both Alexander's city plan and a trusted architect to enact it.

The design Alexander had drawn on the sand included harbours, palaces, temples, markets – and a library dedicated to the muses. Within decades, this once-desolate place had undergone an incredible transformation into a city that transported its visitors into the future. When the Greek geographer Strabo visited Alexandria three centuries later, he gasped at its grandeur, comprising “building upon building”. The promenade, designed by the renowned Greek architect Dinocrates, was angled to encourage a welcome breeze from the ocean that infused the streets with the scents of cinnamon and honeysuckle; even five centuries after Alexander's fateful visit, Roman civil servant Herodian described “billows of perfume” and “sweet aromas throughout the city”.

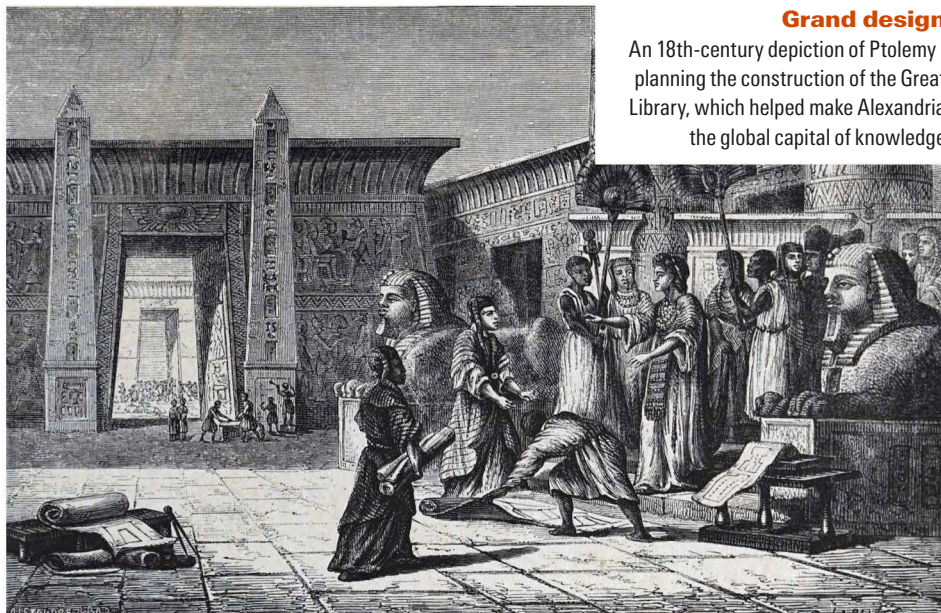
Horses and chariots traversed eight-lane-wide roads, while marbled colonnades provided shade for pedestrians. Grand courts and statues – including many depicting the city's founder – dotted the paths. Around a main square, locals drove mules and donkeys to bustling markets where stalls were stacked high with fruits, vegetables, loaves of bread and barrels of cloudy beer. Artisans showed off colourful, decorative mosaics of glass, stone and clay. There were bathhouses, tree-studded gardens and a gleaming temple dedicated to Alexandria's very own god, Serapis, looming over the city at the top of the hill.

Shrines to learning

In the complex called the Museum (the ‘shrine of muses’), scholars gathered to think and to debate, to read and to write. At its heart stood the Biblion (the ‘shrine of books’) housing ceiling-high bookshelves brimming with scrolls stacked on top of one another like wooden logs.

But the real focus of energy was the dock, at the exact spot where Alexander had arrived on Pharos. The previously lifeless island now boasted one of the tallest man-made structures in the world: the three-tiered Pharos Lighthouse. This extraordinary building was well over 100 metres high, made of reflective white limestone – a lofty beacon of light that symbolised the power and grandeur of the city. It also served a practical purpose, guiding ships into the two busy harbours on either side – “beautifully enclosed both by the embankment and by nature”, as Strabo put it. In the lighthouse's top storey, mirrors reflected the sun's bright rays during the day and, by night, fire from its furnace created a magnificent glow.

The city of Alexandria was an idealistic



Grand design

An 18th-century depiction of Ptolemy I planning the construction of the Great Library, which helped make Alexandria the global capital of knowledge

When he arrived at the strategic hotspot on which the city was built, Alexander dropped to his knees in a state of ecstasy

endeavour, intended from the very start to be a global capital. Though conceived by its founder, it was implemented by his childhood friend and general, Ptolemy I, and his successors. Alexandria's founders had a unique and innovative vision of what makes a city successful – and it was nothing short of radical. They imagined and enacted two outrageous theories. First, that bringing together diverse people from far and wide in a strategically located spot would produce economic prosperity and make the city a world trade capital. Second, that gathering and generating knowledge – via the Library and Museum – would consolidate the city as a global powerhouse. Within a single century, these two premises had combined to make Alexandria the global capital of both trade and knowledge.

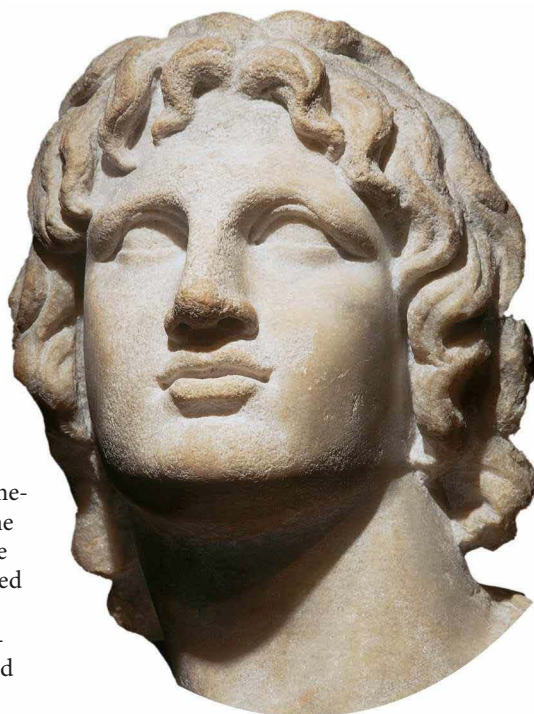
Built from scratch

Alexander knew that taking control of such a prime location could play a part in expanding and strengthening his realm, bolstering his grand plan to build a unified empire that stretched as far east as Persia and India.

To do so, he envisioned roads and ports connecting Europe with Asia. However, unlike most cities, Alexandria was born not from war or geographical division but was created from scratch. Rather than developing organically, Alexandria was purposely visualised, conceived, shaped and expanded.

People from across the region were invited to populate the new city. With trade a key aspect of its identity, welcoming rather than othering citizens was part of the economic plan. This was to be a *polis* (city state) founded on the notion that it is possible to harmonise different cultures and traditions in order to achieve a greater goal.

At a time when the Hellenistic world regarded non-Greeks as barbarians, and



A marble head of Alexander the Great. His design for Alexandria included harbours, palaces, temples and a library

SEVEN WONDERS OF ALEXANDRIA

The landmarks that helped make the city a masterpiece of the ancient world

1 Knowledge bank

"The place of the cure of the soul." So, according to ancient sources, read the inscription above the shelves of Alexandria's vast book collection: the **Great Library**. The Library was probably architecturally very grand, with several halls and ceiling-high wooden cabinets filled with scrolls.

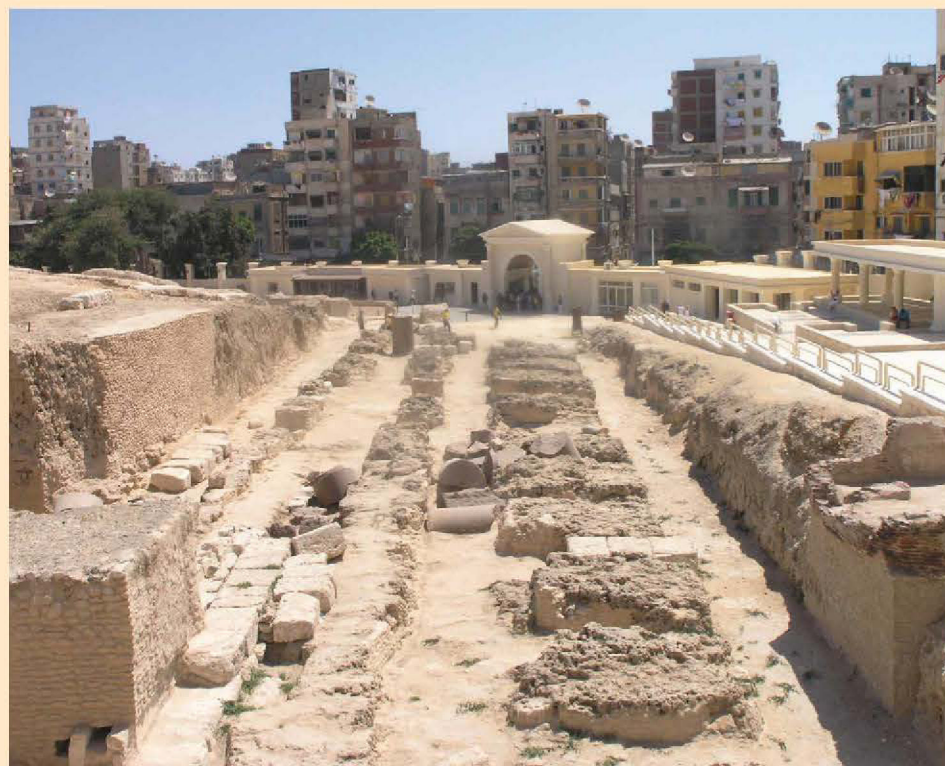
This impressive building was sited inside Alexandria's extensive Museum complex. The Museum's entrance had a grand porch reminiscent of Greek temples, while expansive gardens and colonnaded walkways led to private study rooms, lecture halls and a banquet room. There was an outdoor seating space with a semi-circular arrangement of stone benches, as well as small theatres.

2 Leisure gardens

From its initial design in the fourth century BC, Alexandria featured vast gardens. The most famous of these was the **Park of Pan**, a pleasure garden that included such amenities as a marble-seated amphitheatre and a public bath. That century also saw the construction of the Eleusis (Advent) Park. Now in the centre of the modern city, it is the oldest surviving garden in the world.



A 19th-century depiction of the Great Library, which housed the most extensive collection of writing in the world



3 The glowing god

"The most magnificent building in the whole world." That's how the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus described Alexandria's **Serapeum**. This suitably splendid temple was constructed on the city's highest hill for Alexandria's divine protector, Serapis, in the third century BC.

A staircase in the temple complex led down to a nilometer, a device to measure the level of the Nile's waters; placing it here enabled Serapis to protect the river from drying up or overflowing. More than 100 marble steps led up to the Serapeum. In the centre stood a vast statue of Serapis, covered with ivory and gold. Windows were positioned so the sun's rays made the god glow.

The Serapeum was used to store thousands of books that couldn't fit into the library. It was damaged during a second-century AD Jewish revolt before Christians destroyed it in the late fourth century.

The ruins of the Serapeum, the magnificent temple dedicated to Alexandria's divine protector

4 Sky and thunder

By the early third century BC, after 14 years of construction, Alexandria's harbour was guarded by the **Pharos Lighthouse**, soaring over 100 metres high. One of the seven ancient Wonders of the World, it was built from white limestone that reflected the sunlight, and comprised three tiers resting on a 10-metre-wide cylindrical base. At the top stood a sculpture of Zeus, the god of sky and thunder, holding a thunderbolt.

The 12th-century explorer Ibn Jubayr from Al-Andalus (the Islamic state then ruling the Iberian peninsula) wrote that "description falls short of it and the eyes fail to comprehend it; relating it [in words] is inadequate, and the spectacle is vast".



Alexandria's lighthouse soared more than 100 metres into the sky

Despite its name, Pompey's Pillar was once topped by a statue of Emperor Diocletian



5 Lost in translation

When Roman emperor Diocletian visited Alexandria at the turn of the fourth century AD, he created a triumphal monument to himself: an armour-clad statue atop one of the largest monolithic columns in history.

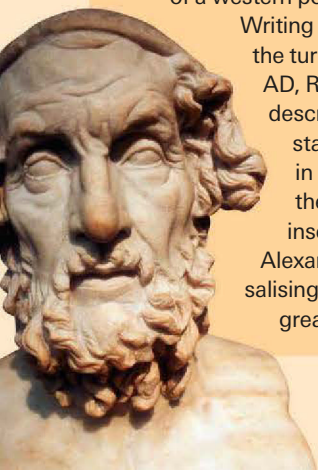
Pompey's Pillar was a 27-metre-high column of rose granite, with a grey granite capital and a sparkling porphyry statue. The sculpture no longer stands atop the pillar but in the 18th century a fragment of Diocletian's thigh was discovered, suggesting a statue 7 metres high.

But it had nothing to do with Pompey the Great. When the crusaders arrived in Alexandria, they misread the pedestal's inscription of Egypt's governor Publius as 'Pompey' – and the name stuck.

6 A heavenly poet

The role of Greek writer Homer (below) was pivotal in the city's founding: lines about this location in his poetry had come to Alexander the Great in a dream, driving the king to make the journey here to found his city. In the third century BC, Ptolemy IV Philopator built a shrine in Alexandria dedicated to Homer – the **Homereion**, representing the first deity-like veneration of a western poet.

Writing sometime around the turn of the third century AD, Roman author Aelian described a magnificent statue of Homer seated in a semi-circular arc in the shrine, with an inscription confirming Alexandria as the universalising home of the greatest writer.



7 Cleopatra's love affair

In the first century BC, Alexandria's most famous queen, Cleopatra VII, began constructing a temple in honour of her lover, Julius Caesar. The **Caesareum** of Alexandria was completed by Octavian – later the emperor Augustus – who defeated Cleopatra. The contemporary philosopher Philo of Alexandria described the harbour-side temple as "huge and conspicuous... embellished with porticoes, libraries, chambers, groves, gateways and wide open courts" and decorated with "pictures and statues in silver and gold".

Octavian also transferred two enormous 15th-century BC obelisks from the temple of the sun-god Re 200 miles away to be re-erected in front of the Caesareum. In the 18th century, the French called these obelisks Cleopatra's Needles; today, one stands on London's Victoria Embankment, the other in New York City's Central Park.

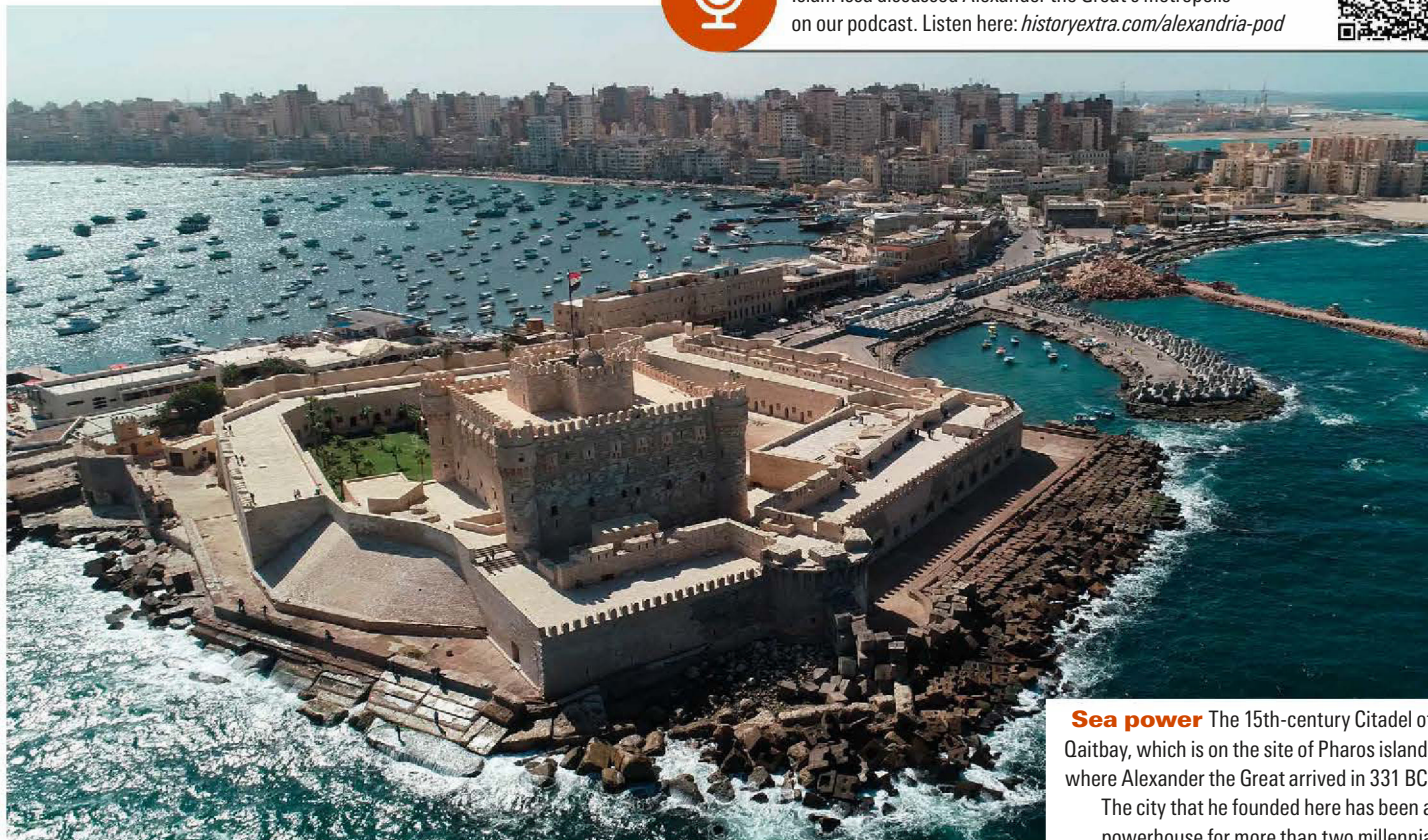
when Egyptians were highly protective of their own traditions, this was a brave new ideology. Drawn by the Alexandrian dream, thousands of people flocked to the new city from every direction. Egyptians travelled north through the desert, Europeans sailed across the Mediterranean, and Jews made their way west from the Holy Land, to be joined by many more groups including Ethiopians, Levantines, Romans and Indians.

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus, who married a woman from Alexandria, wrote that Jews moved to the new city "invited by the goodness of the soil, and by the liberality" of its early leaders. Indeed, it's said that, in his very first design, Alexander allocated a district for Jews in his new city. In an attempt to grow the populace, Jews were exempted from tax and promised freedom of worship, with grand synagogues and special theatres built here. And during the reign of Ptolemy II, the Hebrew Bible was translated into Alexandria's very own dialect of Koine Greek. Thanks to Serapis, the newly amalgamated Greco-Egyptian god championed by the Ptolemies, the Greeks and Egyptians were also able to find common ground.

Migration and multiculturalism were effective ways of increasing the city's population and, in turn, its military, commercial and economic power. Before long, Alexandria became a significant regional trading centre and transport hub that welcomed merchants and travellers from east and west. It imported goods from as far as Persia and India, and exported a range of items to Europe – even the British Isles – that included art, oils, spices, wine and grain, becoming Rome's key breadbasket.

Alexander's successors also put his second priority – gathering and generating knowledge – into action. A second-century BC letter, the earliest reference to the Library of Alexandria, tells us that the Ptolemies gave the first chief librarian, Demetrius of Phalerum, an unprecedented budget "in order to collect... all the books in the world"

Alexandria imported goods from as far as Persia and India and exported them to destinations as remote as the British Isles



Sea power The 15th-century Citadel of Qaitbay, which is on the site of Pharos island, where Alexander the Great arrived in 331 BC. The city that he founded here has been a powerhouse for more than two millennia

– a seemingly impossible task. The Library nonetheless came to house hundreds of thousands of works – by far the biggest collection of writing ever gathered up to that point in history.

The Museum, too, became the world's leading research centre, with scholars coming from across the region to work here, given stipends, food and accommodation by the state. They created novel philosophies and pioneered original inventions in a range of fields, from astronomy to geography and from mathematics to poetry. Alexandria's medical school made huge advances and, unlike its Greek counterpart, welcomed women through its doors.

Knowledge capital

To Alexandria's leaders, knowledge equalled power. They put into place various policies to ensure that this authority was maintained, and that the city's library would outshine all others. Books were not allowed to leave the city and ships docking at the harbour were searched for written materials, which would be confiscated immediately. The export of papyrus was even banned to stop rival cities and libraries from increasing their stocks.

By gathering hundreds of thousands of books from around the world (there were half a million scrolls, according to the second librarian, Callimachus), and by researching and disseminating new philosophies, theories and inventions, Alexandria's rulers became the global custodians of knowledge.

Coupled with the city's economic success, the Great Library brought Alexander's burgeoning capital incredible influence.

Alexandria's architects successfully executed its founder's radical vision of how to create a city – and, more, how to make it a global power. By utilising a strategic location to build a metropolis from scratch, by gathering diverse people to live and prosper together in harmony, and by collating and generating knowledge, Alexandria redefined what it means to successfully construct and maintain a city and society.

As the centuries went on, Alexandria's fame and status made it a key target for the most powerful empires, from the Romans and Ottomans, to the French and British, attracting the likes of Julius Caesar, Saladin, Napoleon and Admiral Nelson. As migration to its shores continued, its various residents

brought with them a wide range of traditions, values and faiths, and developed the philosophies of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

When 15th-century explorer Vasco da Gama arrived at Asia by sailing all the way around Africa, Alexandria's unique claim to linking the east and west began to diminish. Nonetheless, the city continued to attract different groups and by the 19th and 20th centuries, Armenians, Greeks, Italians and Turks called it home. With the rise of Arab nationalism in the mid-20th century, many of these departed.

Today, Alexandria is a bustling metropolis with a population exceeding 6 million and responsible for 40 per cent of Egypt's industrial capacity. Its founder died at 32, eight years after he first set foot on Pharos. He never returned to see Alexandria in all its glory. More than two millennia later, the city that Alexander the Great envisaged during a brief visit to a barren island off the windswept coast of north Africa still stands proud. **H**

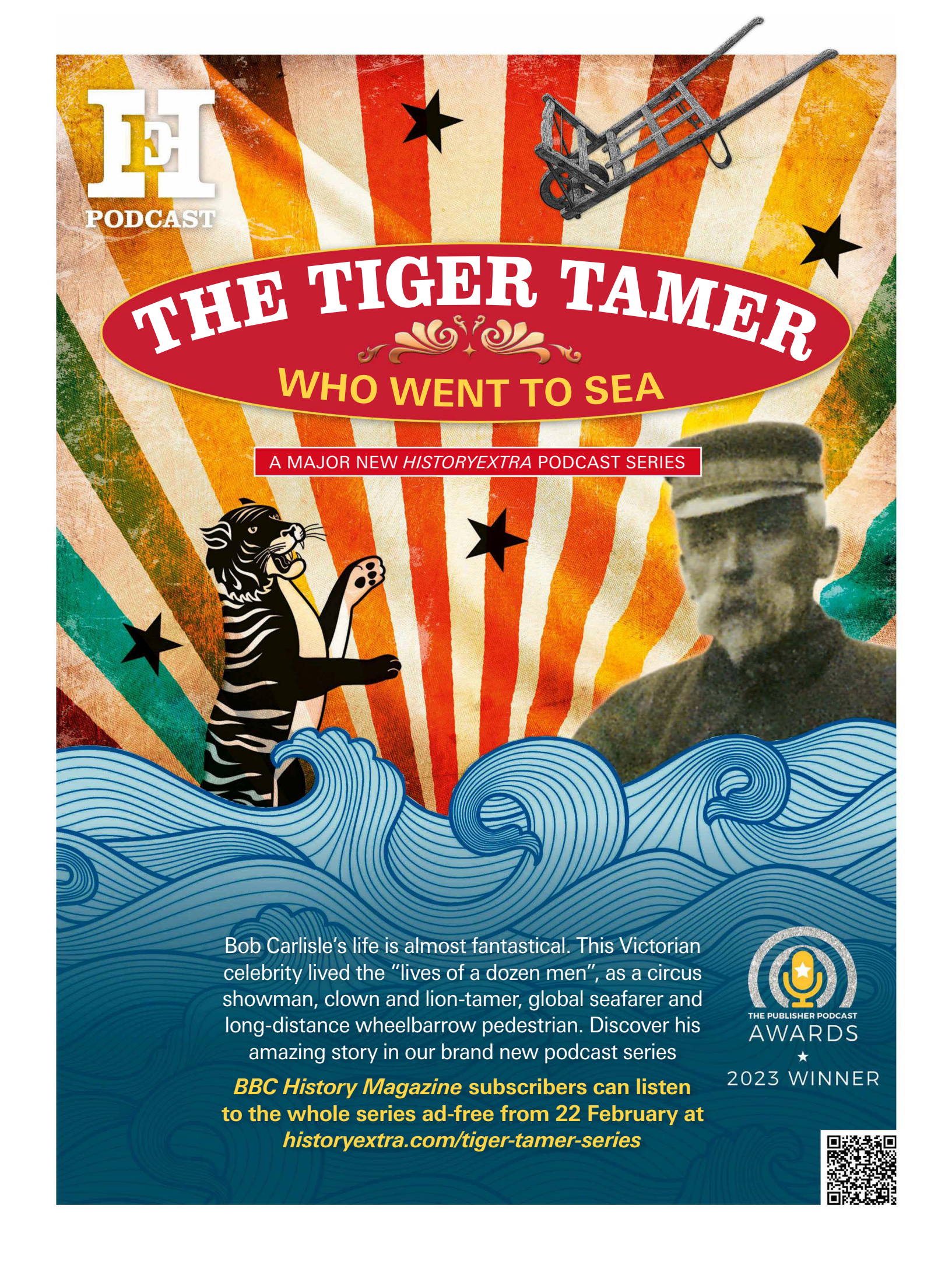
Alexandria's architects executed its founder's radical vision of how to create a city – and make it a global power

Islam Issa is professor of literature and history at Birmingham City University. His latest book, *Alexandria: The City that Changed the World*, was published by Sceptre in November 2023



Islam Issa was among the contributors to an episode of Radio 3's **Free Thinking** looking at the evolution of libraries. Listen here: bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001sm3p





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BOOKS

HISTORICAL FICTION

“She had to be nothing less than extraordinary to make a mark in the science of geology”

Joanne Burn reveals how fossil hunter Mary Anning influenced her latest novel > page 73



20TH CENTURY

// Many Germans are proud of their country’s desire to do the right thing, as well as its confrontation of the past //

Katja Hoyer on a book that looks at how Germany has attempted to grapple with the crimes of the Second World War > page 74

RELIGION

“It makes a significant contribution to Christian thought – and, one hopes, to the author’s own soul”

Sarah Foot praises a work on the evolution of English Christianity > page 72

20TH CENTURY

“He paints a vivid picture of a tempestuous age: an emerging modern Britain battling for stability”

John Jacob Woolf enjoys a new study of the Edwardian era > page 76

INTERVIEW

Judith Flanders discusses her new book on death and mourning rituals in Victorian Britain > page 68



INTERVIEW / JUDITH FLANDERS

“There was a general perception that Queen Victoria’s mourning was neither normal nor acceptable”

JUDITH FLANDERS talks to Rebecca Franks about her new book, which delves into the customs surrounding dying, death and mourning in Victorian Britain

Rebecca Franks: How different was the Victorian view of death to our modern conception of it?

Judith Flanders: The main difference was that death was part of daily life. It wasn’t neatly tucked away in hospitals where you could go in and visit someone for an hour but didn’t see anyone die. Today, many people now go happily through their whole lives without ever seeing a dead person, which was simply not possible in the 19th century. Hospitals were very limited in the kinds of diseases and illnesses they cared for, and they were a place of last resort for people who were too poor or desperate to be cared for at home. Infant death was vastly more common than it is today, though that was also simply due to the vagaries of population. There were more young people than there were old people, and infant death therefore accounted for a much larger percentage of death than death in old age.

How did the level of infant mortality impact society?

For many years there was a theory among historians that because children died so frequently and so young, their parents didn’t care about them – it wasn’t worth investing emotion into small lives that might soon be lost. However, if you read the scraps of evidence we have regarding the working classes and their responses to children’s deaths, this simply isn’t true. For instance, we see parents naming their newborns after older siblings who had died. This was previously interpreted as proof of not caring, but it seems to me so obvious that for the most impoverished in society – particularly in the early part of the 19th century, when permanent gravestones were not common

– this was the only way that they could memorialise their lost children. Because people do love their babies. We don’t have to be terribly smart to know that.

Your book takes readers through the rites and rituals connected to funerals and mourning, but the story begins with the sickbed. What would it have been like to be sick in Victorian Britain?

One of the things we’ve forgotten due to the huge medical advances of the 20th century is that people could be in the process of dying for a very long time – for years, potentially. For example, I read the diary of a teenager who died at around the age of 19, having spent the previous three years suffering from tuberculosis. Initially, she found that she couldn’t go out for walks, before getting so

weak that she couldn’t make it down the stairs or even sit up in bed. Unlike today, when we often think of death in three stages that pass relatively quickly – you’re well, you’re ill, you’re dead – dying could be this long, tragic process.

You describe the 19th century as a century of epidemics, with deadly diseases such as cholera sweeping through the general population. How did these threats shape people’s attitudes towards their lives?

Cholera was the first big epidemic of the 19th century. It arose in south-east Asia and gradually came to Europe via Russia, finally arriving in Britain in 1831 and gathering force the following year. Terrifyingly, most people died of dehydration less than 24 hours after experiencing the first symptoms.

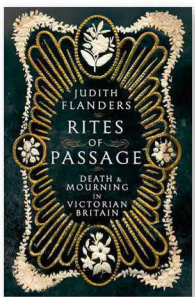
One of the most fascinating things about the first cholera epidemic, however, was that some people denied it was happening. They said it wasn’t that bad, and that others were overreacting. Intelligent people said this, too: the philosopher Thomas Carlyle wrote endless letters saying that cholera didn’t exist, before, in the next paragraph, mentioning that he was going to an awful lot of funerals.

What was the social role of the funeral in the Victorian period?

It doesn’t break down very easily into one thing. Around the start of the period the funeral was an orgy of display, reaching a climax in the middle of the 19th century. This was typified by the funeral of the Duke of Wellington in 1852, which was, without argument, the height of extraordinary over-elaboration. There were more than 10,000 people in the procession, and the funeral car was so large and heavy that an entire regiment of soldiers was required to march behind it, with ropes tied around their waists; whenever the car travelled downhill, they effectively served as its brakes. It was totally crazy, and it revolted a lot of people. From that 1852 moment there was a diminution into what was called burial reform, or funeral reform, and things became much less elaborate.

Was there a moral aspect to these changes?

Both types of funerals had a moral dimension; in fact, elaborate displays were initially considered a sign of respect for the person who had died. But very originally, in the extravagant heraldic funerals of the aristocracy, the primary function was to commemorate not the character of the deceased, but their position within society. This was emphasised by the fact that the person’s heir – not their wife or daughter – often served as the chief mourner, demonstrating that the status quo was being preserved. It wasn’t until the 19th century that funerals gradually started to become more about the person



Rites of Passage: Death & Mourning in Victorian Britain

by Judith Flanders
(Picador, 352 pages, £25)



PROFILE

Judith Flanders is a historian, author and journalist who specialises in writing about the Victorian period. Her previous books include *The Victorian City: Everyday Life in Dickens' London* (Atlantic Books, 2012) and *A Place for Everything: The Curious History of Alphabetical Order* (Picador, 2020)

PHOTOGRAPH BY
CLIVE BARDA

themselves. Fascinatingly, Charles Dickens once chose not to go to the funeral of a close relative because he did not know them well. He said that he would only pay his respects to somebody he knew and loved.

Were there any elements of the Victorian funeral that became conventions and consistent over time?

There were a number of characters – people provided by the undertaker – who were, in effect, performers. An example were the funeral mutes, who silently stood at the door of the house from which the coffin was leaving to go to the funeral. They were swathed in black crape – a dull, matte fabric, used only for mourning or funeral wear – and would stand outside, holding crape-covered sticks known as wands. There would also be a person called the featherman, who would carry a tray of black ostrich plumes: a symbol of grief. The horses pulling the hearse would be decorated with black plumes, too.

The more prosperous people within society had a particularly odd custom: while the family members and mourners would follow the hearse, the many acquaintances not going to the funeral would send their carriages instead. You would therefore end up with a line of empty carriages following the procession, with the total number indicating the social status of the deceased.

Those were the ideals people were aiming for, but there are many other heartbreaking descriptions from the period. The author of one source describes seeing a couple and their small child walking down the street, with the man carrying another child's coffin on his shoulder. So not only were they unable to afford plumes and a horse, but they weren't even able to afford a hand cart in which to place the coffin. In a prosperous funeral, the coffin would typically be covered with a black and white velvet cloth, but in this instance, the coffin was wrapped in the woman's shawl. This was a token of belonging to a community where niceties were observed. They did what they could.



ABOVE: Victorian undertakers would pay silent mourners known as 'mutes' to stand outside the home of the deceased
RIGHT: The hair of the dead was sometimes also added to jewellery



// Not only were they unable to afford plumes and a horse, but they weren't even able to afford a hand cart in which to place the coffin //

Were there many rules and customs about etiquette and how one should mourn?

Oh goodness, yes. There were long lists of mourning clothes, with details of what one should wear following the death of a parent, brother-in-law, niece or nephew, for example. But if your husband died, the guidelines were particularly strict: you were supposed to wear full black mourning wear for a year, after which you could adopt what was known as 'half mourning', which included colours like grey and lavender. After that, you could gradually move into brighter colours if you so chose.

Widows were also supposed to remain at home for 12 months, except to attend church. We know this was not possible for the bulk of the population: people had to work and leave the house for all sorts of reasons. So did it really happen? No. Like most things in life, there's what you're supposed to do and then there's what we know everybody really does.

So how different was the ideal from the reality overall?

I was very interested in reading letters and diaries about mourning clothes, as these were the most obvious expression of loss – particularly for women. Men, on the whole, got away with a lot more. They wore a black armband for a few weeks and that was it, whereas widows were in black crape for a year.

When you read the letters, however, you discover that many people didn't get new clothes each time they suffered a bereavement, but instead had their old ones dyed because that was all they could afford. Even people of high social status would refrain from getting a new cloak if it proved too expensive. Instead, they would say things like, "I'll put some black braid on this one, it'll be fine", or they would wear their normal clothes at home and put on their one black dress if they had to go out. Further down the social scale, people would make gestures toward what they could not afford, like buying a black ribbon for their hat. It was an indication that they understood the norms of society and still wanted to belong.

Could you tell us about the importance of mourning jewellery and hair jewellery? They both seem fascinating...

And more than a little creepy! Hair jewellery was a big deal: people would cut off locks of their hair and give them to their beloved, their siblings, or their children (this wasn't only a death thing). However, the trouble with hair is that, after a while, it becomes a little difficult to identify. As a result, people would often incorporate it into pieces of jewellery: often a locket, or the back of a bracelet or ring. There were even specialist hair jewellers, who would plait, twist or tie the hair in some way, so that it made a textured display object.

These were very common. So if your father died then you would have a ring with his hair, or if your mother died you would get a locket etc. People had many of these things and a whole industry developed.

Some people might also wear a mourning ring, made from black enamel. It would have the initials of the person who died, and perhaps the date of their death.



The woman in black

Queen Victoria, seen here in 1875, continued to dress in mourning wear long after her husband's death. The monarch exhibited numerous traits associated with what the medical field today calls "disordered grief"

and I think it's beyond doubt that Victoria suffered from what is today called disordered grief; she was psychologically destroyed by Albert's death. If you go through today's modern psychiatric manual for the condition, she ticks every single box.

For the first couple of years, her doctors were seriously worried about her. They didn't quite say they thought she was insane, but she was awfully close to it. And because of her social position, she was able to impose her own requirements on everyone around her. I found an anonymously written book by one of the ladies of her household, published about 30 years after Albert's death, in which she claims that the queen did not allow the women around her to wear lavender, because she thought the colour was too close to pink, and pink was too cheerful.

There's also an interesting letter by Mrs Oliphant, a famous novelist of the period. Her husband died young and all her children would die over the course of her lifetime. She says that Victoria has a happy, loving family, and doesn't have to work, whereas she has to write novels in order to keep her surviving children fed. Basically, she's saying: "What's Victoria got to be so fussed about? She's lucky."

Overall, there was a general perception that Victoria's mourning was neither normal nor acceptable. And certainly, there was a view within the government and the royal household that she used her grief as an excuse for doing what she wanted to do. She'd never liked carrying out state duties and so she thought, okay, I'm not going to.

And in private, her behaviour was unusual.

Your book also reveals how she had everything in their home photographed and catalogued so that it would be frozen in time.

Victoria had this very strange fixation with 'stuff'. Over the years, after Albert's death, anything that he had touched could not be moved. If he had overseen the décor of a room, it was photographed and catalogued. Everything had to be kept exactly the way it was. When curtains, carpets and upholstery faded and wore, duplicates were made. She was the same about her own things: when she died, she still had the dishes she had eaten off as a baby.

Victoria died in 1901, at the age of 81. What was the public reaction at that point?

Victoria had been on the throne as long as anyone could remember. At the same time, however, there was a feeling that change was needed. When Victoria died, it had been more than 62 years since her coronation, and the people involved in planning the ceremony had long since died. When it came to the coronation of Edward VII in 1902, everything had to be made up. **TE**

And how did gravestones fit into the picture?

One of the most astonishing things to me was realising that until about the 17th century, gravestones and coffins were not the norm. People were often buried directly in the ground without coffins or permanent memorial markers, and subsequently moved when more space was required in the churchyard. Gravestones were mostly in churches for the aristocracy, and it wasn't until the 19th century that they were desired by the bulk of society.

Yet often, in the working classes, the family's savings would be spent during times of illness, so people did not have the money to pay for a grave, much less a gravestone. Sometimes, people who could not afford their own graves were buried in a communal area, at the expense of the parish. Later, when the necessary funds had been raised, the family would go back to the council or parish and say something to the effect of, "We now have the money to buy a grave, so could we please have Cousin Genevieve back?", and the deceased would be exhumed and reburied.

We can't talk about the Victorian era without discussing its royal figurehead, Queen Victoria. In 1861, when she was 42, her husband, Albert, died. How did she mourn him?

Ostentatiously. Many people today think that Victoria's mourning was the norm and that the rest of society approved, but neither of those things are true. I spoke to a specialist in grief and mourning,



Life and death in the 19th century

Listen to an extended version of our interview with Judith Flanders at historyextra.com/podcast



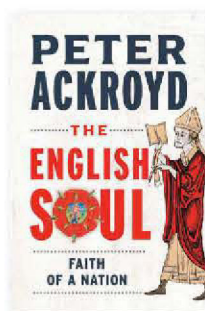


Religious retreat The medieval mystic Julian of Norwich, shown in an illustration from 1912. Peter Ackroyd “accepts as fact that Christianity has been the anchoring and defining doctrine of England since the seventh century”

RELIGION

A window onto England's soul

SARAH FOOT has high praise for a book that traces the evolution of English Christianity over the course of 1400 years, through the lives of its greatest thinkers



The English Soul: Faith of a Nation
by Peter Ackroyd
Reaktion Books, 388 pages, £20

Historians have long sought to connect the invention of the English as a people and nation with

Christianity and with the use of the English language. They recognise the crucial role that the vernacular played as a means not only to preach the faith but to embed its principles

into the very fabric of English society. No one has, however, attempted the task that Peter Ackroyd has set himself in this beautifully written reflection on the nation's faith.

Tracing the spirit and nature of English Christianity over 1400 years, Ackroyd defines the constant that underpins the national character as 'the English soul'. Accepting as fact that Christianity has been the anchoring and defining doctrine of England since the seventh century, Ackroyd acknowledges the important role played by other religions in shaping English society and refining its religious sensibilities. But this is unashamedly an account of Christian

thought – or rather, of Christian thinkers.

Twenty-three chapters narrate the story of the Christian faith among the English from the time of the Venerable Bede to the end of the 20th century. Each chapter takes 'religion' to be a different idea or concept, and most are focused on named men or women, considered either individually or in small groups.

For Bede, religion is defined as history. 'Religion as Revelation' explores the thought of Julian of Norwich and other late medieval mystics. 'Religion as Poetry' introduces the reader to the religious poet George Herbert; 'Religion as Battle' describes the creation of the Salvation Army by Catherine and

// Peter Ackroyd has served up a gentle meditation on the continuities of thought and expression of religious ideas across time //

William Booth. The chapter 'Religion as Scripture' is subtitled 'the Authorised Version', but like other chapters focuses on individuals – in this case, those involved in the creation of the King James Bible of 1611. 'Religion as Sect' considers a large group of thinkers, disparate 17th-century dissenters and non-conformists including Baptists, Levellers and Muggletonians. 'Religion as Established' assesses the standing and lives of clergy generally in English society between the Restoration of 1660 and the end of the 19th century.

The pattern 'religion as...' varies once, to consider atheism as religion. That chapter also stands out for addressing individuals who were not contemporaries: Charles Bradlaugh (1833–91), Annie Besant (1847–1933) and Richard Dawkins (born 1941).

Visions and music

Although the tenor of most of the book is deeply theological, only the last chapter takes the title 'Religion as Theology'. There Ackroyd considers the importance of three significant 20th-century figures: John Robinson, John Hick and Don Cupitt. There is no summary to the long narrative. Rather, in a brief reflection on the way in which Cupitt's understanding of the world and the individual's discovery of faith resembles the thought of the 14th-century English mystic Richard Rolle, Ackroyd writes: "We may note here the constancy of the English soul, as it has been described in this book."

While chapter titles such as 'Religion as Order' or 'Religion as Thought' might lead the reader to anticipate an analytical exposition of abstract ideas, each chapter is centrally biographical in form, setting the ideas and writings of individuals (in these cases the 17th-century archbishop of Canterbury William Laud and 19th-century theologian John Henry Newman) in the context of their own life stories. The book might thus best be characterised as a series of biographical essays about a sequence of English Christians (and a scattering of non-believers), opening a window into the soul of each.

It also offers, perhaps less intentionally,

a social history of English Christianity. Wherever possible, Ackroyd introduces each new figure by locating them geographically, describing their father's occupation (and mother's background), stating where they were educated, and consistently reflecting on the influence of education on the formation of individual minds and the expression of Christian belief. William Tyndale – "the true father of English Christianity, in the sense that he inspired those who wished to read, speak and hear the faith in their native English tongue" – was born in a Gloucestershire Cotswold village and educated at Magdalen School and Hall in Oxford. The evangelical Charles Spurgeon came from Kelvedon in Essex; his father was a lay preacher and his grandfather an independent minister. "The chapel and the pulpit were his inheritance," we're told.

John Robinson's was a "thoroughly clerical family", his father a canon of Canterbury Cathedral, in whose precincts Robinson was born, before Marlborough College, then Jesus College, Cambridge. Often assumed to have come upon matters of faith as a result of vocation, Robinson was "in truth a trained, as well as a highly skilled and formidable, theologian".

An overarching argument emerges cumulatively across the volume, tracing the profound influence of Christianity on the development of English social and political culture. "A man of God was also expected to be a man of government," Ackroyd reminds us, referring to the 16th–17th-century bishop and scholar Lancelot Andrewes.

Common threads that weave the text together include visionary experiences of radiant images and vivid characters, as witnessed in the writings of Julian of Norwich, the Puritan preacher John Bunyan, or poet and painter William Blake, whose "vision has never been lost. It is integral to the English soul." And, above all, there's music. "Song and sweetness are never far from the texture of Rolle's prose, which is filled with polyphony, so that in his solitude he fashions a language of praise and joyfulness."

The great delight of this book lies in the quality and texture of Ackroyd's own prose, his capacity to capture the essence of individuals in evocative phrases. This gentle meditation on the continuities of thought and the expression of religious ideas across time rests on the particularities of the specific thinkers addressed, on their individual souls. It deserves to be read slowly and contemplatively. The whole book makes a significant contribution to Christian thought – and, one hopes, to Ackroyd's own soul. **E**

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Sarah Foot is regius professor of ecclesiastical history at the University of Oxford

FROM FACT TO FICTION

A lasting impression

Joanne Burn discusses *The Bone Hunters*, her tale of a female 'fossilist' in 1820s Lyme Regis

Your new novel was inspired by the real story of Mary Anning (right). What was it about Anning that you found compelling?

I'm intrigued by people who don't fit the norm. Mary Anning, as well as being one of the greatest 'fossilists', has been referred to as 'peculiar' and 'mannish'. She was from a family that knew tragedy, and she had to be nothing less than extraordinary to make a mark in the newly emerging science of geology – which she did.

Were there traits of Anning's that you used to develop the lead character of the novel, Ada Winters?

Ada is precocious, curious and determined, shunned at times by her local community as well as by the scientific world to which she longs to belong – all traits inspired by Mary Anning. Ada's fiery character, though, contributes to the kind of dramatic events that deviate from the relatively quiet life I imagine Mary Anning lived!

What research did you do into the scientific world of the 19th century?

I studied the original *Transactions of the Geological Society*, reading first-hand what these men had to say. The absence of contributions from any women, especially the brilliant Mary Anning, speaks volumes.

And how did you set about capturing the atmosphere of 1820s Lyme Regis?

Well, I walked 60 miles of the Jurassic coast! The Lyme Regis Museum was a brilliant resource, as were copies of 'Lyme Voices' – a series of booklets documenting the oral history of Lyme. *Memoirs of a Smuggler*, written in 1837 by the fisherman and smuggler John Rattenbury, provided quirky, grubby, briny details and atmosphere.

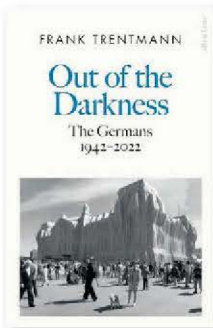
The Bone Hunters

by Joanne Burn
Sphere, 352 pages, £20



Ghosts of Germany's past

KATJA HOYER is impressed by a study of a nation's attempts to grapple with the crimes it perpetrated during the Second World War



**Out of the Darkness:
The Germans
1942-2022**

by Frank Trentmann
Allen Lane, 880 pages, £40

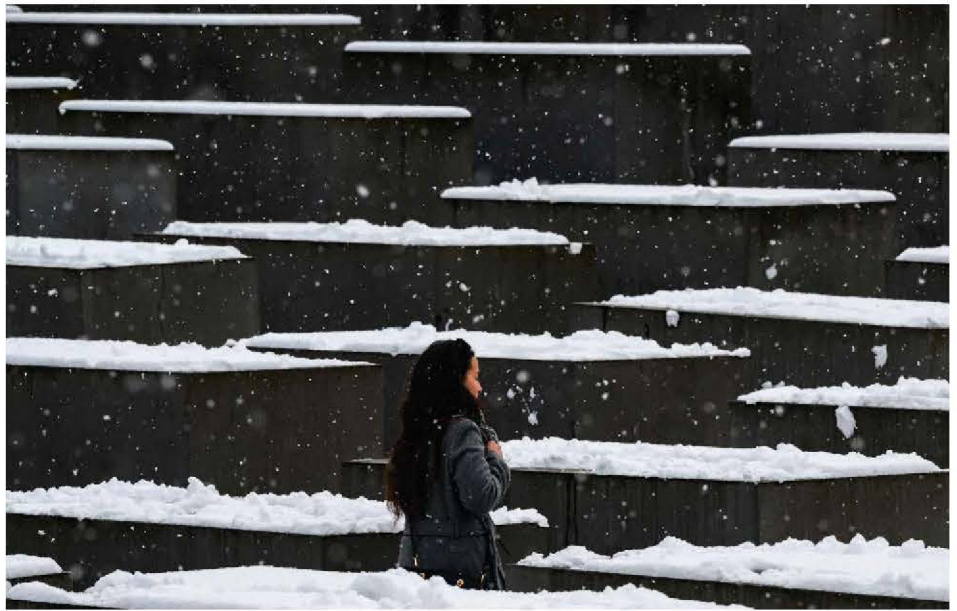
"Free Palestine from German guilt," have rung the chants at many of Berlin's demonstrations since

the outbreak of the Israel-Gaza war. Meanwhile, chancellor Olaf Scholz insists that "Germany's history and the responsibility arising from the Holocaust made it Germany's perpetual duty to stand up for the existence and security of Israel." The conflict in the Middle East has cut deep into the soul of a country that is still trying to come to terms with itself.

Nearly eight decades have passed since the end of the Second World War, humanity's most devastating military conflict. Under its guise, Nazi Germany murdered 6 million Jews, 3 million Soviet prisoners of war, 8 million non-Jewish civilians, nearly half a million Roma and Sinti, and hundreds of thousands of others it considered undesirable.

Since then Germany's moral comeback has been celebrated, not least by Germans themselves. When Angela Merkel allowed more than 1 million refugees into the country in 2015, the head of the Green party told the German parliament: "When it comes to helping others, we are the world champions." Today, many Germans are proud of their country's desire to do the right thing as well as its continued confrontation of the past. "There is no German identity without Auschwitz," declared President Joachim Gauck in 2015.

But Germany's moral recovery from war and genocide has neither been straightforward, nor is it complete. In *Out of the Darkness: The Germans 1942-2022*, historian Frank Trentmann charts this "long and difficult" journey. Few are better placed to navigate the "thicket of moral challenges" that postwar Germany – a country occupied, divided and reunited – has grappled with over the past 80 years. Trentmann was born and raised in Hamburg but has lived abroad since



Moment of reflection A woman at Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. "Today, many Germans are proud of their country's continued confrontation of the past," writes Katja Hoyer

Germany's moral recovery from war and genocide has neither been straightforward, nor is it complete //

1986, mostly in Britain and the United States. Now professor of history at Birkbeck, University of London, he has observed modern Germany's ongoing identity crisis from within and from the outside.

Trentmann conducted seven years of meticulous work on this book, producing a fascinating patchwork of vignettes, statistics and analysis. Collectively, they give a deep insight into how Germany and its people grappled with questions of guilt and identity.

We hear, for instance, about West Germany's desire to "make good" (*Wiedergutmachung*) the damage done to Nazi Germany's victims, especially Jews. Yet in reality, victims

often struggled to receive compensation. Elsa Hodapp, for example, was incarcerated in Ravensbrück concentration camp in 1942 for attempting to help a Jewish woman flee to Switzerland. Her claim that she was a victim was rejected after the war on the grounds that she couldn't prove that she had acted out of "principled opposition to the Nazi regime".

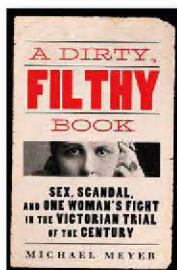
Trentmann's engaging style provides a calm voiceover to the big and small stories of postwar Germany's grappling with what's right and what's wrong, suggesting rather than drawing sharp lines between good intentions and moral complacency. He navigates complex issues like self-pity, denazification, immigration, reunification and military intervention with refreshing clarity.

This book couldn't be more timely. With global issues gathering urgency, Trentmann challenges Germany to take more responsibility. But in order to do that, it has to do more than state what it is against. Germany also needs to work out what it is for. **II**

Katja Hoyer is visiting research fellow at King's College London and author of *Beyond the Wall: East Germany, 1949-1990* (Allen Lane, 2023)

SOCIAL

The 'badass' icon



A Dirty, Filthy Book: Sex, Scandal, and One Woman's Fight in the Victorian Trial of the Century
by Michael Meyer
WH Allen, 400 pages, £25

One of the problems with biography, if an author is not careful, is that it can quickly become hagiography. Although Michael Meyer attempts to steer clear of this, *A Dirty Filthy Book* can't help but fall under the sway of its subject, the pioneering birth control activist and social reformer, Annie Besant (1847–1933). An established icon in birth control history, Besant is long overdue wider public recognition. Focusing on her trial (alongside the radical politician Charles Bradlaugh) for the publication of *Fruits of Philosophy* – a sex education guide for the masses – Meyer interweaves Besant's multifaceted life into an engaging prose, full of intriguing details.

It is, in many ways, a love letter to Bradlaugh and Besant's relationship, which



Born radical The "bold, courageous" Annie Besant (top, third right) with members of the London match girls strike committee in 1888

directly shaped the society we have today through its impact on radical politics – atheism, suffrage, trade unions and, of course, sex education.

It is not, however, without error. One of Meyer's more outlandish claims is that Lord Melbourne brought servant girls into Windsor Castle so he could indulge his passion for flagellation. That Melbourne enjoyed a good whipping is no secret, but not, I believe, inside the hallowed home of the queen. Most disappointing, however, is the lack of any acknowledgement of Besant's involvement with the paedophilic theosophist Charles Leadbeater. Evidence of her attempts to protect him sit in the British Library, deeply

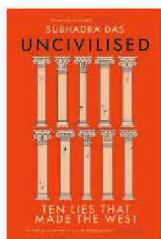
disheartening reading for anyone who seeks to idolise her. Women deserve, as Meyer says, their 'badass' icons, but not at the expense of accurate history. Ignoring the complexity of the past, in the desire to proclaim someone as inspirational, only does us all a disservice.

Even with these flaws, Annie Besant herself leaps off the page. She is bold and courageous – a leading figure in the fight for female knowledge and sex education in the Victorian era. **H**

Fern Riddell, author of *Sex: Lessons from History* (Hodder, 2022)

CULTURAL

The power of the few



Uncivilised: Ten Lies that Made the West
by Subhadra Das
Hodder & Stoughton, 304 pages, £20

Subhadra Das's first book catches two particular waves in current publishing. Firstly, it explains a large and complex issue through a number of objects, ideas or themes. Secondly, it addresses the politically contentious topic of decolonisation, through a coruscating critique of western civilisation.

Das describes herself as a historian, writer, broadcaster and stand-up comedian (her wit suffuses this book). A British citizen born in Abu Dhabi to Indian parents, she is a former curator of science collections at University College London. She has also

worked as a researcher into critical eugenics – the discredited 19th-century theory of 'racial improvement' and selective 'breeding' of peoples. This personal and academic background makes her uniquely qualified to call out the 'lies' that underpin the west.

The book's 10 chapters each take a central tenet of western culture and scrutinise in whose interest they each operate. As befits a curator, Das begins and ends in the museum, starting in UCL with a 'hair colour gauge' designed by a Nazi race scientist, and concluding in Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum and its African and Oceanic objects.

In between she skewers slogans such as 'Art for art's sake' (which, she argues, disguises the rapacity of the western art market, exemplified in the theft of the Benin bronzes by a British colonial force in 1897). She even trains her sights on the very edifice of western democracy – implemented, as she sees it, "not by the people for the people, but through power exercised over the many by the few".

There are deft pen portraits of the history of the creation of modern clock time, colonial education, the invention of psychoanalysis

and justice, and a recurring concern with rational science, which, she contends, has always acted in the interests of western colonial power.

Das is at her best when writing in the first person about racial and gendered injustice within western institutions. But not everything sticks. Later chapters on art and death feel undeveloped (issues such as the discovery that many of the Benin bronzes are themselves 'fakes' complicates the argument around repatriation). She also ignores the fact that commentators have been documenting the decay of 'western civilisation' (whatever that is) for at least a century – even before the German historian Oswald Spengler produced his infamous *Decline of the West* (1918–23).

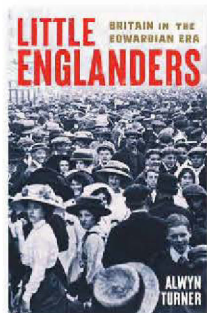
Das is clearly a talented writer with much to say. But her canvas here feels too large to convert those who are sceptical about decolonising western civilisation. **H**

Jerry Brotton, professor of Renaissance studies, Queen Mary University of London and author of *A History of the World in Twelve Maps* (Penguin)

20TH CENTURY

Goodbye to the gilded age

JOHN JACOB WOOLF is won over by an exploration of the Edwardian era, which looks beyond the golden-era cliché to find a nation beset by a sense of unease



Little Englanders: Britain in the Edwardian Era
by Alwyn Turner
Profile, 400 pages, £25

The Edwardian era conjures images of country houses, tea on the lawn and long summer afternoons –

an era where refined ladies and gentlemen indulged in garden-party gossip and a spot of croquet. Cultural productions such as *My Fair Lady*, *Mary Poppins* and *Downton Abbey* have suggested something of a golden age: warmth and cosiness sandwiched between the momentous Victorian era and the great global slaughter of the First World War.

The Edwardian era – named after the eldest son of Queen Victoria, the corpulent and lusty Edward VII – was a short one. In Britain there was less innovation than the previous century and things were arguably more stable too: the birth rate and death rate had fallen, so the population was older and households smaller. The era has also received less historical treatment than the epochs between which it sat; as such, Alwyn Turner's *Little Englanders: Britain in the Edwardian Era* is a welcome contribution to an oft-overlooked period.

More than that, though, Turner smashes the mythologies of the age, painting a picture of an era undergoing significant social change – one with a dramatic and democratic beating heart that pumped out socially mobile politicians such as Herbert Asquith and David Lloyd George alongside terrorist suffragettes, anarchists, socialists and revolutionaries. It was an age of profound unease: less imperial security, crippling strikes and a tangible sense that one epoch had ended and a new one was beckoning, but without a clear sense of what that would be.

In a remarkable yet accessible read, Turner takes us from music halls to the Boer War; from the mutoscope (an early motion-picture device) to motor cars; from pageants to the popular press; from *Peaky Blinders* to the Summer Olympics. We encounter eminent Edwardians such as Winston Churchill and



Sharp practice British archer Queenie Newall prepares to loose an arrow. Newall won gold at the 1908 London Olympic Games, which features in Alwyn Turner's kaleidoscopic review of a dramatic decade

// Turner smashes the mythologies of the age, painting a picture of an era undergoing significant social change //

the singer Marie Lloyd, and lesser-known characters such as George Joseph Smith who specialised in manipulating (and sometimes marrying) women, before inducing them to steal or murdering them and running off with their money. And Turner cracks open some of the great divides of the age, exposing divisions between the Liberal and Labour movement, tariff reform and free trade, votes for women and the status quo.

Although Turner argues that where the Victorians were outward looking, the Edwardians were introspective, he nonetheless shows how that inwardness accompanied an interest and concern in seemingly foreign

affairs. This could take the form of the Chinese hand laundry – whose mothership opened in September 1900 and came with the promise that thousands of Chinese people would be imported to expand the laundry operations – through to a malicious concern with immigration levels that culminated in the Aliens Act of 1905. He shows us how the empire divided everyone from domestic politicians to music hall audiences as a pronounced anti-war sentiment spread through songs, literature and politics.

Indeed, what Turner does so well is capture the cultural landscape, treating us to the leisure, the stories, the songs and the movies of the era, illuminating Gaelic and Russian influences through to blackface solo performances. Ultimately, Turner paints a vivid picture of a tempestuous age: an emerging modern Britain battling for stability and order – and ultimately rushing towards the trenches on the western front. **II**

John Jacob Woolf is a historian and co-writer of the Audible series *Stephen Fry's Edwardian Secrets* and *Stephen Fry's Victorian Secrets*

DIARY By Jonathan Wright, Danny Bird and Eleanor Barnett
PODCAST Aztec warfare
EXPLORE Harlech Castle, Gwynedd
TRAVEL Lisbon in five places

ENCOUNTERS



John Singleton Copley's *Watson and the Shark* (1778) is among the works on display in the Royal Academy's new exhibition

EXHIBITION

Portraying colonialism

Discussions about slavery and empire – and the most appropriate ways of publicly addressing such subjects – have long been taking place within the British art world. However, the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 brought the topics into sharper focus, and prompted a number of UK galleries to investigate their own links to the slave trade and the legacy of colonialism more generally.

One institution continuing to probe such connections is the Royal Academy of Arts, whose new exhibition, *Entangled Pasts, 1768–Now*, includes more than 100 paintings and sculptures created in the two and a half centuries since the Academy was founded. Touching on themes of race and belonging, highlights include John Singleton Copley's allegorical painting *Watson and the Shark*

(above), as well as Sonia Boyce's four-panel piece *Lay Back, Keep Quiet and Think of What Made Britain so Great*, which features the artist's own image.

Entangled Pasts, 1768–Now: Art, Colonialism and Change

Royal Academy of Arts, London / until 28 April / royalacademy.org.uk

TV

Tragic flight

Although it flew 27 successful missions between 1981 and 2002, the US Space Shuttle *Columbia* will forever be synonymous with the tragic events of 1 February 2003, when it disintegrated while re-entering the Earth's atmosphere. At a time when Nasa is making preparations to return to the Moon, the loss of the Space Shuttle's seven crew members remains a sobering reminder of the dangers of space travel.

Mixing first-hand testimony from the astronauts' families with previously unseen archive footage, BBC Two's new series, *Columbia: The Final Flight*, examines what happened. The programme also considers the legacy of the Space Shuttle era, when it briefly seemed as if going into orbit might somehow become routine.

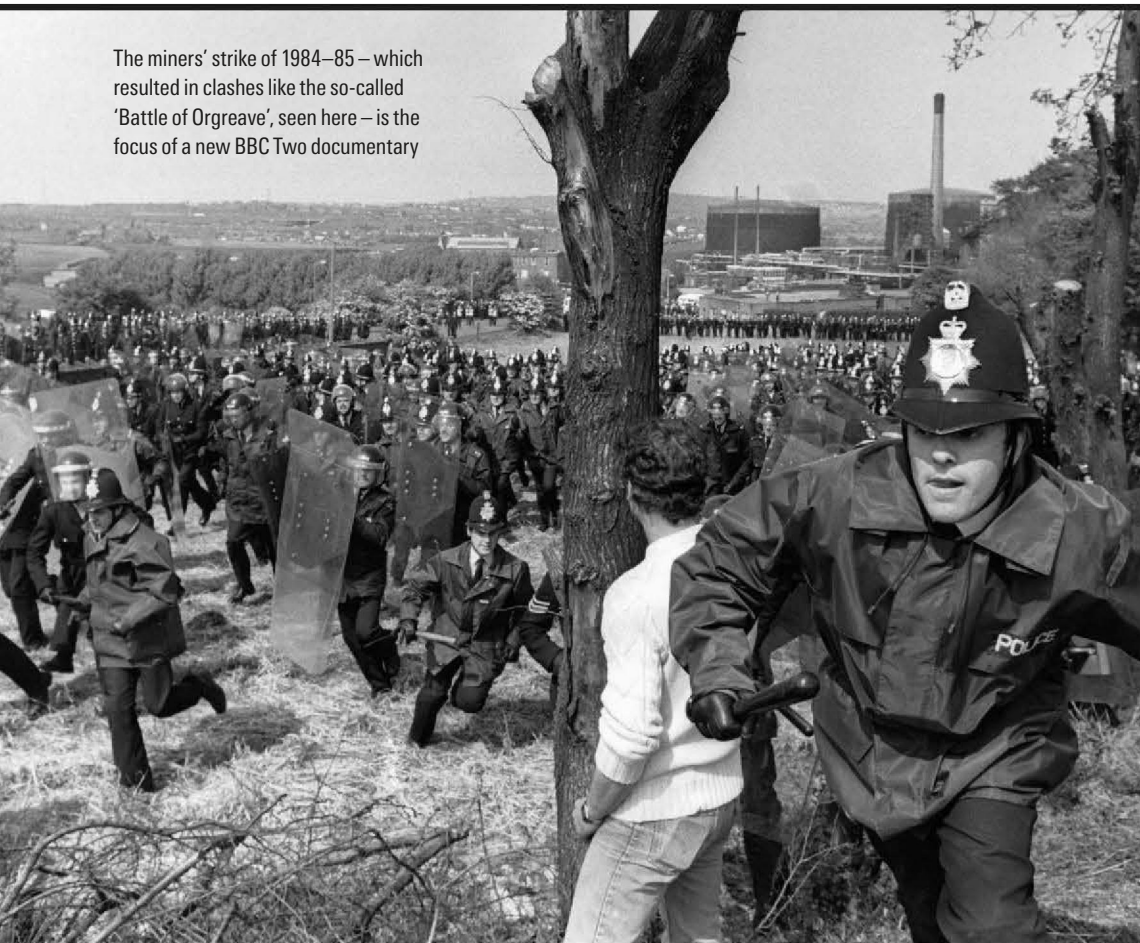
The Space Shuttle That Fell to Earth

BBC Two and BBC iPlayer / mid-February

Columbia leaves the launch pad ahead of its final flight. The Space Shuttle broke apart on 1 February 2003, resulting in the deaths of its seven crew



The miners' strike of 1984–85 – which resulted in clashes like the so-called 'Battle of Orgreave', seen here – is the focus of a new BBC Two documentary



TV

Bitter legacy

One event above all has come to be emblematic of the anger and division that surrounded the miners' strike of 1984-85. On 18 June 1984, up to 8,000 miners picketing a coking works in Orgreave, South Yorkshire, clashed with up to 6,000 police officers. The scenes of violence on TV news bulletins shocked the nation.

What was it like to be at the centre of this bitter dispute? Four decades on, a new feature-length documentary from the team behind *Our Falklands War: A Frontline Story* tells the story of the strike from the perspectives of 15 ordinary men and women – people who lived in some of the communities most affected by the British government's determination to break the power of the National Union of Mineworkers.

Miners' Strike: A Frontline Story

BBC Two / spring

GETTY IMAGES

HISTORY ON THE AIRWAVES



A bird-shaped *zimingzhong* from the 18th century. Like many other timepieces of its kind, it features components made in Europe, as well as China

EXHIBITION

Chinese timekeeping

In the 18th century, China's emperors began importing elaborate mechanical timepieces from Europe. These objects, known as *zimingzhong* (literally 'bells that ring themselves'), were highly prized for their decorative motifs, and were even placed on proud display inside the imperial palace complex in Beijing.

A new exhibition at London's Science Museum delves into the stories behind these remarkable objects, with more than 20 examples from China on show in the UK for the first time. Featuring the work of European and Chinese craftspeople, it's a display that tells stories both of elite artistry and cultural exchange.

Zimingzhong: Clockwork Treasures From China's Forbidden City

Science Museum, London / until 2 June / sciencemuseum.org.uk

"The fact we still have this lifeboat institution standing by to help offers extraordinary continuity"



Actor and comedian **GRIFF RHYS JONES** (left) tells us about his new BBC Radio 4 documentary, which traces the 200-year history of the RNLI

This year marks the bicentenary of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI). Why are you such a keen supporter of the charity?

Some of my earliest memories are sitting in my father's boat in Bosham, West Sussex. You become conscious, I think, if you sail at all, that the sea is a capricious thing. I've not been out in a lot of major storms, but I've been out in force eight, force nine. It is bizarre how strong and powerful the effect of the sea and wind can be for anybody, especially in a small boat.

How did the RNLI get started?

It was established before the sort of government action we would expect today. It was started by people who were independently motivated and supported by donations from interested maritime parties.

What is fascinating about the RNLI is that it is still based on voluntary support. One example that brought this home to me is when a lifeboat brought a dinghy sailor, who had got into trouble, ashore and my father, who was a doctor, helped to save this guy's life.

What can we expect from your new BBC Radio 4 programme?

Most of the stories we tell are of extreme heroism and the fact that people put to sea in, to begin with, quite small, fragile boats. There's also a reminder that the RNLI is in continuous action. That's the thing you take away: the level of service that such an institution is able to achieve.

Are we still as connected to the sea as we once were?

One of the most mysterious things to me about maritime history is that, if you read books from the early 1900s, everybody knew about boats: authors like Joseph Conrad and WW Jacobs, for instance.

The world was full of maritime events, but it's now a closed environment to most of us. Yet the fact we still have this lifeboat institution standing by to help offers an extraordinary continuity. It takes us right back into our history.

Two-hundred years after it was founded, is the RNLI in good shape?

Yes, I think it is. It's such a cliché to say that it does a fantastic job, but it's well run and has ambition, and is always learning from what it's done before. As long as it can do that, I assume it can go forward. **E**

Archive on 4: RNLI at 200, presented by Griff Rhys Jones, will be broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on Saturday 2 March



The crew of the *Mary Scott* – a lifeboat stationed in the seaside town of Southwold, Suffolk – in 1934



Weekly TV & radio

Visit historyextra.com for updates on upcoming TV and radio programmes



RECIPE

Eighteenth-century mushroom ketchup

ELEANOR BARNETT shares her instructions for making a flavourful sauce with roots in south-east Asia

The chances are that when you think of ketchup it's a thick tomato sauce – a store-cupboard staple – that goes particularly well with Friday night's fish and chips or slathered on an American-style hamburger.

As you might suspect, this type of ketchup is a relatively modern invention. Although tomatoes were first domesticated in what is now Mexico and transported to Europe following Spanish colonisation in the 1500s, they took a few hundred years to be fully incorporated into local cuisines. In fact, tomato ketchup wasn't sold commercially until the mid-19th century, with the famous Heinz brand only launching in Pennsylvania in 1876.

The original 'ketchup' actually hails from south-east Asia, where it started life as a salty, fermented, fish sauce. Various known as 'catsup', 'catchup' or 'kitchup', the name most likely comes from the Chinese word *kôe-chiap*, which was used to refer to the brine of pickled fish as far back as the sixth century AD. The first English-language recipes date from the 17th

century, when British travellers and sailors encountered the sauce in the far east and were inspired to create their own versions back at home.

A c1900 advert for 'Tomato Catsup'. Ketchup began life as a fish sauce in south-east Asia



Once the ketchup has been bottled, the left-over mushrooms (below left) can be dried into a powder to flavour other meals

The earliest British ketchups were typically made using anchovies, walnuts, oysters or mushrooms spiced with ginger, cloves and pepper in a salty, vinegary or alcoholic brine. By the Victorian era, the mushroom version was especially popular: mushrooms grew abundantly in Britain, making it an easy, flavourful and long-lasting sauce to add to meats and gravies. More salty than sugary – and a lot thinner than the modern-day ketchups – it was more akin to Worcestershire sauce.

To create mushroom ketchup, the mushrooms were first salted to extract some of the moisture (and act as a preservative), before being squeezed and heated to draw out the remaining liquor. Once that was done, the liquid was then boiled with spices and strained into bottles.

This is essentially the method in the mushroom ketchup recipe I have included on the right, which is based on a recipe from a 1747 book by the English cookery writer Hannah Glasse. According to Glasse, the sauce could "keep two years" – although, to be on the safe side, I wouldn't keep it for longer than a couple of months!

Interestingly, there is a recipe for another type of ketchup (or 'catchup') in the same cookbook that could supposedly be stored for up to 20 years, as it was intended for the captains of ships travelling on long voyages overseas. Indeed, the existence of ketchup is evidence of the globalisation and colonisation that marked the early modern period – historical processes that continue to shape our modern-day food system and societies around the world.

Makes: c200ml

Difficulty: 2/10

Time taken: 1 hour (plus overnight preparation)

INGREDIENTS

500g common mushrooms (button or chestnut)
1 tbsp sea salt
½ tsp whole peppercorns
¼ tsp each ground ginger, ground nutmeg or mace, cloves

METHOD

1. Lay out the mushrooms in a wide bowl, cover with the salt, mash a little, and leave overnight.
2. Put the mushrooms (and any liquid they have excreted) in a covered pan on the hob for 10 minutes to extract more juice.
3. Let the mushrooms cool and then strain the mixture through a cheesecloth, collecting the liquid in a bowl.
4. Save the mushrooms for a later meal (try drying them on a low heat in the oven, then crushing or blending them into a powder to use as a flavouring).
5. Put the liquid back on the hob and add the spices, simmering for 10 minutes.
6. Strain through a cheesecloth once cold and store in a sealed glass bottle. **H**

Eleanor Barnett is a food historian at Cardiff University and @Historyeats on Instagram. Her new book, *Leftovers: A History of Food Waste and Preservation* (Apollo), is out in March



FILM

Kicking against sexism

Although the first Women's World Cup was held in 1991, the competition's roots go back much further. In particular, a 1971 tournament held in the heat of Mexico City and Guadalajara proved fans would flock to see women play.

Not that Fifa, Uefa and domestic football associations gave their approval. For although the final match attracted a crowd of 100,000, Copa 71 – featuring teams from Argentina,

Denmark, England, France, Italy and Mexico – was an unofficial competition.

Now, more than 50 years later, new feature documentary *Copa 71* tells the stories of those who were there, and how they look back on that extraordinary summer.

Copa 71

In cinemas from Friday 8 March

Denmark's Lis Lene Nielsen holds the Copa 71 trophy aloft after her team's victory over Mexico in the tournament final

RADIO

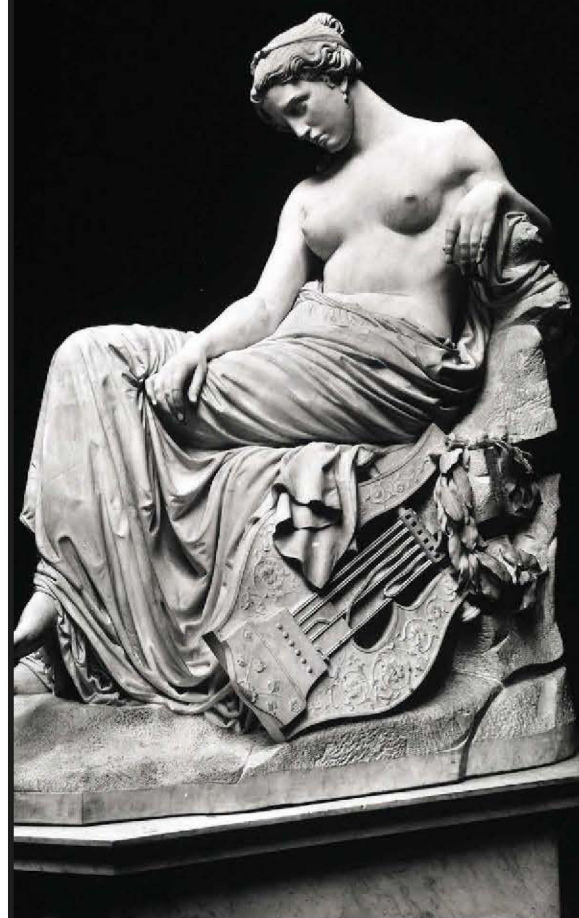
Life on Lesbos

For all her reputation as one of the greatest lyric poets ever to have lived, few biographical details of Sappho (c630–c570 BC) have survived. Which leaves all the more space for writer Hattie Naylor to build a new radio drama inspired by Sappho's verse, including work rediscovered in the 21st century.

Starring Thalissa Teixeira in the title role, *Sappho in Fragments* focuses on the poet's family life, and in particular the scandalous relationship between her brother, Charaxus, and a courtesan, Rhodopis. The involvement of Durham University classics professor Edith Hall ensures that the drama carries historical authenticity, but this is also a story that touches on modern themes – dealing with trolling, reputation management and how love is endlessly surprising.

Sappho in Fragments

BBC Radio 4 / Wednesday 28 February



A 19th-century statue of Sappho by Giovanni Dupré, currently on display at La Galleria Nazionale, Rome. The life and works of the poet serve as the inspiration for a new comic drama on BBC Radio 4

PODCAST

New perspectives

Not everyone is lucky enough to hail from London, Manchester or Bristol – cities generally regarded as being exciting places to live. Instead, like Milton Keynes native Anouska Lewis, many of us hail from places that others regard as a bit dull.

But what happens when you look at such towns and cities through the prism of the past? One answer, to judge by the new BBC Sounds series *Hometown Boring*, is

that you can find fascinating and unfamiliar stories. Plymouth, for instance, throws up the tale of intersex athlete Mark Weston (1905–78), 'The Devonshire Wonder'. Other episodes tell stories linked to Ormskirk, Cumbernauld, Chepstow, Slough and, of course, Milton Keynes.

Hometown Boring

BBC Sounds / available from Thursday 15 February



A street under construction in Milton Keynes, 1978. The new town is one of the 'boring' places discussed in a new podcast series

EXHIBITION

Tapestry of life

What is the best way for a city to celebrate its history? One approach is to invite members of the community to come together and collaborate on a piece of public art, which is precisely what has led to the creation of a new tapestry now on display in Dundee.

Stitched by more than 140 local volunteers, *The Dundee Tapestry* tells the story of the city's past and the people who have shaped its identity – from suffragettes and factory workers to jumper-wearing Northern Soul dancers. The intricate scenes also draw attention to lesser-known moments in the city's past, too, such as an 1877 visit from US president Ulysses S Grant.

Overall, it's a fitting testament to Dundee's creative spirit, and its unique status as the UK's first (and only) Unesco City of Design.

The Dundee Tapestry

V&A Dundee / on display until 28 April / vam.ac.uk/dundee



The 35 panels that make up *The Dundee Tapestry* were created by more than 140 local volunteers



Ben Mendelsohn stars as Christian Dior in a series that delves into the fashion designer's experiences in occupied Paris

TV

Changing fashion

Reflecting the way his 'New Look' collection of 1947 revolutionised fashion, Christian Dior's name has become synonymous with optimism and a world coming back to life. Yet this is also a tale with roots in Second World War Paris where, in the wake of military service, Dior worked for couturier Lucien Lelong.

A lavish new Apple TV+ drama, itself titled *The New Look*, follows this fascinating backstory. Created by Todd A Kessler (*Damages*, *The Sopranos*), the 10-part drama stars Ben Mendelsohn as Dior, with Maisie Williams playing his Resistance fighter sister, Catherine. Meanwhile, Juliette Binoche portrays Coco Chanel, the grand dame of French fashion, whose links with leading Nazis remain a source of much controversy. **H**

The New Look

Apple TV+ / streaming from Wednesday 14 February

THREE HISTORYEXTRA PODCAST EPISODES ON THE AMERICAS



Beyond the battlefield

Outside of war, what made the Aztecs tick? Caroline Dodds Pennock previously appeared on the *HistoryExtra* podcast in

2020 to answer listeners' questions and popular internet search queries about the Mesoamerican civilisation. In conversation with Ellie Cawthorne, Dodds Pennock covered topics as diverse as architecture, religion and the Aztecs' deadly contact with the Spanish. historyextra.com/aztecs-everything-pod



The end is nigh?

The Maya have often been wrongly credited with predicting the world would come to a fiery end in 2012, sparking disaster movies and

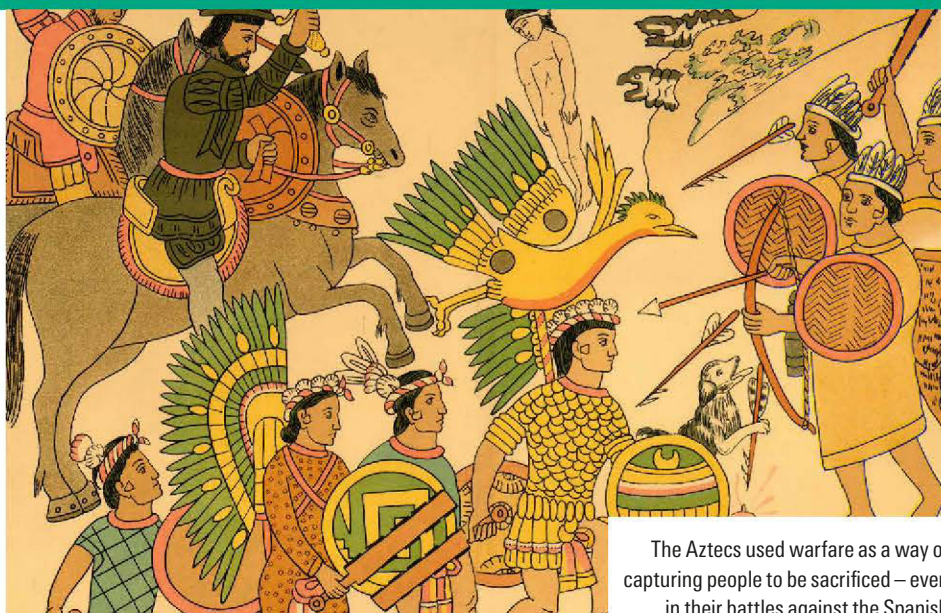
frenzied internet discourse at the turn of the 21st century. But did they really claim to know the year of the apocalypse? Rob Attar put this question, and many others, to Matthew Restall in this fascinating episode dedicated to the Maya, from 2021. The wide-ranging discussion covered everything from doom-laden calendars to diet and everyday life. historyextra.com/maya-everything-pod



Crown of thorns

Fast-forwarding through the centuries, I also want to highlight an episode that delves into the little-known story of Ferdinand Maximilian – an

Austrian archduke whose brief tenure as emperor of Mexico ended in unmitigated disaster. Speaking with Elinor Evans, historian Edward Shawcross was able to shed light on the sequence of events that led to Maximilian's execution by firing squad in 1867. historyextra.com/ferdinand-maximilian-pod



The Aztecs used warfare as a way of capturing people to be sacrificed – even in their battles against the Spanish

The Aztecs at war



RHIANNON DAVIES discovers why war was so important to the Mesoamerican people – and why they believed a badly cooked meal could prevent a soldier from shooting straight

Witnessing the Aztecs wage war would have been an awe-inspiring, if extremely terrifying, sight. Warriors would first rain a hail of projectiles down on their enemies, before swarming onto the battlefield wielding clubs or spears studded with wickedly sharp obsidian blades. Rhythmic drumbeats would pound through the air, mingling with the shrieks of the wounded and dying.

For the Aztecs (who called themselves the Mexica), warfare was a crucial part of everyday life – as historian Caroline Dodds Pennock recently explained on an episode of the *HistoryExtra* podcast. Heading to the battlefield served a wide range of purposes, from helping the Aztecs assert themselves against neighbouring city states, to giving fighters the chance to rise up through the ranks of their partially meritocratic society.

According to Dodds Pennock, warfare also played a religious role: it was an excellent way of gathering new people to be sacrificed. “[The Aztecs] had to offer blood to the gods to keep the world turning,” she told presenter Emily Briffett. “The world would come to an end if they didn’t.”

This never-ending need for sacrifices also had a profound effect on the Aztecs' fighting style. Interestingly, Dodds

Pennock revealed that the Aztecs didn't always set out to kill people during their clashes and, even in their battles against the Spanish, would attempt to “wound their legs so they would fall and could be dragged off the battlefield”.

Warfare dominated life at home, too, with women carrying out rituals believed to provide warriors with spiritual support on the front lines. It was also important to make sure that fighters were fed correctly: “If you let your husband eat a tamale [a traditional dish made from maize] that had stuck to the cooking pot, it was said his arrow wouldn't find its mark when he was at war.”

Although women primarily contributed to the war effort away from the battlefield, Dodds Pennock shared a memorable story from 1473, when a group of female fighters went into action themselves. As well as using conventional weapons, the women attacked their foe “with the weapons of femininity, squirting breast milk onto their opponents, showing them their buttocks and throwing weaving implements at them”. **H**



Listen now

You can hear this episode at historyextra.com/aztec-warfare-pod



Towering achievement

NATHEN AMIN explores a 13th-century stronghold that was built to subdue independent-minded Welsh people, yet has since become a symbol of courage in the face of overwhelming odds

Planted squarely on a rocky crag in north-west Wales, Harlech Castle boasts an unrivalled strategic position. To the east rise the soaring peaks of Eryri (Snowdonia) National Park; to the west stretches the greyish expanse of Cardigan Bay. Many people are attracted to this scenic corner of Wales for the wide range of outdoor activities on offer in the surrounding area. Once here, though, the intimidating presence of the hulking medieval fortress demands discovery.

The origins of Harlech Castle lie in the tumultuous final decade of the 13th century, when the independent Welsh kingdom of Gwynedd was overrun by the English armies of Edward I. This conqueror built Harlech as a formidable if sophisticated symbol of English royal power – a heavily defensive concentric structure designed to intimidate the local populace into submission.

One Welshman who did not cower, however, was Owain Glyndŵr, who captured Harlech Castle from the English in 1404. For five years, it served as Glyndŵr's headquarters while he sought to make his vision of an independent Wales a reality. Harlech even hosted a Welsh parliament, attended by patriots from every corner of Wales. The castle did not hold out indefinitely, though, falling to Prince Henry (the future Henry V) in 1409. Glyndŵr disappeared into the nearby mountains, his fate the subject of folk tales.

Harlech also played a crucial role during the Wars of the Roses. Following the battle of Towton in 1461, the triumphant House of York scattered their Lancastrian enemy across

the land. For seven years, however, a small Welsh garrison in Harlech doggedly resisted Yorkist overtures to surrender, becoming the last Lancastrian holdout in England or Wales. The Welsh Lancastrian leader, Jasper Tudor, used Harlech as a gateway to Britain, occasionally landing from his bases overseas to lead raids into Yorkist territory.

It was only after one particularly violent assault in the summer of 1468 that King Edward IV resolved to end Harlech's intransigence. With nearly 10,000 Yorkist soldiers closing in, on 14 August the exhausted garrison at Harlech downed their weapons and raised the drawbridge. Jasper, however, had fled abroad in the disguise of a peasant. He would one day return with his nephew, Henry Tudor, to revive the Lancastrian cause.

The capitulation of Harlech marked the end of the longest-ever siege of a British fortress. This episode is recalled in the famous song 'Men of Harlech', which remembers the courage of this brave band of Welsh brothers in the face of adversity.

Bold garrisons

Today, Harlech is a much quieter place. Scores of visitors approach daily, crossing a recently installed floating footbridge to enter through the castle's looming gatehouse. The modern adventurer can explore the towers that once housed bold garrisons, or tour the curtain walls for commanding views of the mountains behind and the dunes below.

The site now features a new cafe and exhibition, while the narrow old town of Harlech offers a quaint shopping experience appropriate for the historic surroundings. Nearby stands the moving 'Two Kings' sculpture, inspired by Welsh mythology and symbolising the sorrowful burden of grief. Harlech was built to intimidate; today, it merely impresses. **H**

// One Welshman who did not cower was Owain Glyndŵr, who took Harlech from the English in 1404 //

Nathen Amin is a historian and author. His most recent book is *Henry VII and the Tudor Pretenders: Simnel, Warbeck And Warwick* (Amberley, 2021)

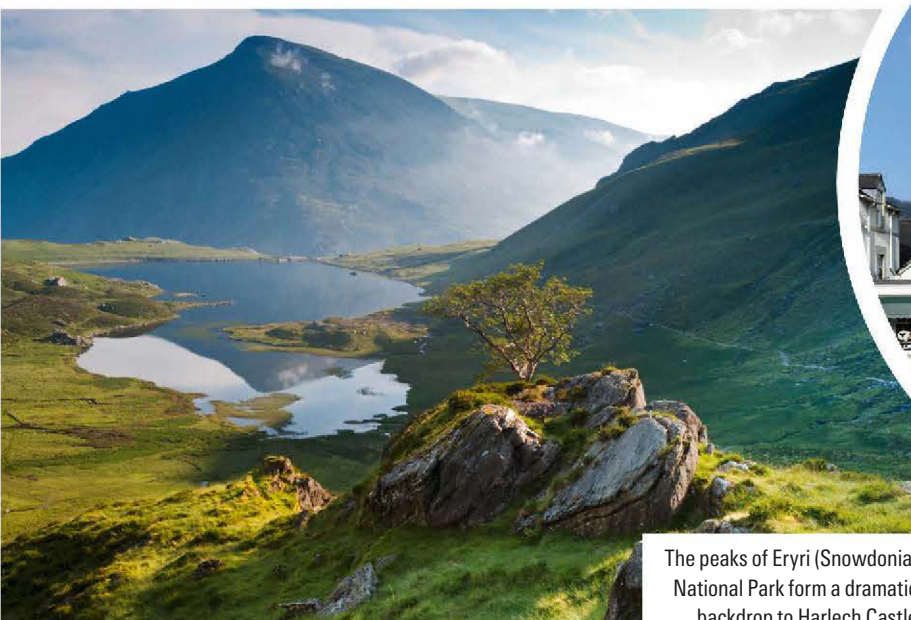


For more information, head to cadw.gov.wales/visit

Edward I built Harlech Castle on a rocky crag in north-west Wales as a symbol of English power



Standing in the shadow of Harlech's hulking medieval fortress, the 'Two Kings' sculpture symbolises the "sorrowful burden of grief"



The peaks of Eryri (Snowdonia) National Park form a dramatic backdrop to Harlech Castle



Owain Glyndŵr, depicted in a statue in Corwen, used Harlech as the base for his revolt against English rule in Wales

Lisbon in five places

From Roman colony to imperial epicentre, Portugal's capital has played many roles.

BARRY HATTON highlights five sites that reveal the city's past and present glories

1 Castelo de São Jorge City through the centuries

More palimpsest than palace, the layers of history visible in this hilltop citadel tell the capital's tale since its earliest days. This is where the Romans built their fortification after founding their city of Olisipo in 138 BC, on the site of an even earlier Iron Age settlement, traces of which are found in the north-eastern corner of the Castle of St George.

Following the victory of Christian forces over Islamic occupiers in the 1147 Siege of Lisbon, King Afonso Henriques transformed the Moorish citadel into his royal residence. Once Manuel I moved to a more luxurious palace by the river in 1511, the castle served other purposes, being used as a prison among other things. After the 1755 earthquake that devastated the city, its ramparts remained in ruins till they were heavily renovated under dictator António Salazar in 1938.

Today, the castle is like a crow's nest, from where the city spreads at your feet in a patchwork of terracotta roofs. Visit early in the morning or evening, when the soft light gives the castle's yellow stone a golden hue.



There has been a settlement on the site of the Castelo de São Jorge since pre-Roman times



In a part of the city rich in historic architecture, the Centro Cultural de Belém stands out like a modernist thumb



2 Centro Cultural de Belém Artistic taste

In some ways, this building is a missed opportunity. Inaugurated in 1993 as a cultural and conference centre, its pale, blocky form is in stark contrast to the ornate decorations of the nearby Mosteiro dos Jerónimos. But it's a fine place to visit for concerts and other events, and to explore the excellent collection of modern art in its Museu Coleção Berardo – including works by Picasso, Andy Warhol, Jeff Koons and Piet Mondrian, as well as pieces by top Portuguese artists such as Paula Rego.

As a bonus, it's just along the street from Pastéis de Belém, a Lisbon institution baking what some claim to be the capital's finest *pastéis de nata* – the custard tarts created by the monks of Jerónimos well over three centuries ago.



The ornate stonework of the Jerónimos Monastery was created from the 16th century

3 Mosteiro dos Jerónimos Ode to exploration

The Jerónimos Monastery, with its cloisters and church, is simply magnificent – and a testament to the vast wealth brought back to Lisbon during its golden age of exploration and trade. Commissioned by Manuel I in 1501, construction took more than 100 years to complete. It's the supreme example of the architectural style dubbed Manueline, with rich, detailed, ornate stone carving. Look for the beautiful *azulejos* (typical blue decorative tiles) in the refectory, the spectacular roof vaulting in the nave, and the 19th-century tomb of explorer Vasco da Gama. You'll also find the empty tomb of young King Sebastião, whose death in battle in north Africa in 1578 led to nearly six decades of Spanish rule in Portugal.

4 Aqueduto das Águas Livres Water of life

This vast aqueduct, rising above the west of the city, is sober and simple in style, unlike the highly decorative Manueline monuments elsewhere. It's plain and to the point, its splendour lying in its sheer scale – an emphatic reminder of the bounty that Brazilian gold brought to the capital. Started in 1731, a passion project of João V, its Arco Grande (Great Arch) is 65 metres high and around 28 metres wide – reputedly the biggest stone arch of its kind in the world. It's said to have three keystones, and can apparently be sundered only by a special kind of sound. It's not known *what* that sound might be, but obviously it's not the sound of an earthquake – because it survived the massive tremor of 1755.



The main course of the Águas Livres Aqueduct is 11 miles long

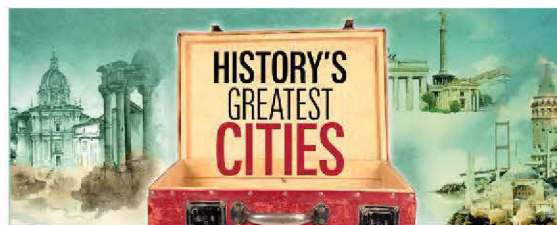
The National Palace of Ajuda was the residence of King Luís I and his wife, Maria Pia, who was behind much of the interior design



5 Palácio Nacional da Ajuda Royal treasure chest

After the city was razed by the earthquake and resulting tsunami of 1755, King José I ordered a new palace to be built in the Ajuda hills above Belém, where the ground was solid. Thus began an astonishingly lengthy period of construction lasting more than 250 years. Started as a baroque edifice, the palace was ravaged by fire in around 1795, and abandoned when the royal family fled to Brazil on the approach of Napoleon in 1807. It was used as a royal residence by Luís I from 1861, but still incomplete at the time of the 1910 revolution, when work stopped again. It was 'finished' by the end of the 20th century, though the western wing was completed only in 2021. Today it houses a priceless collection of royal treasure, including gold and diamonds from Brazil, plus textiles and artefacts from Japan and elsewhere. **H**

Barry Hatton is an author and journalist based in Lisbon. His latest book is *Queen of the Sea: A History of Lisbon* (C Hurst & Co, 2018). He was talking to **Paul Bloomfield**, a travel writer and the host of our History's Greatest Cities podcast series

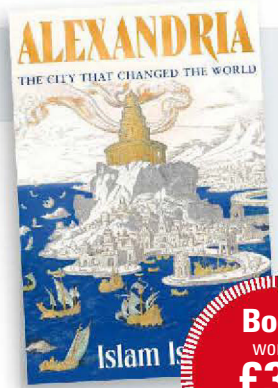


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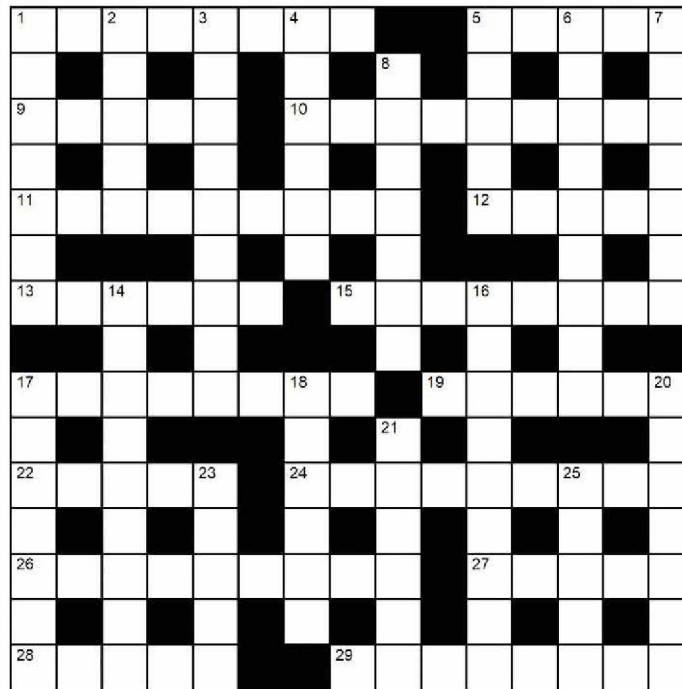
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Across

- 1 Act committed by the judges and officials involved in the trial and execution of Charles I (8)
- 5 John Philip ____, US composer of *The Stars and Stripes Forever* and other marches (5)
- 9 Scottish family name descended from Robert, a knight who came to England with William the Conqueror (5)
- 10 Roman biographer/historian Gaius ____, celebrated for his *Lives of the Caesars* (9)
- 11 Civil rights movement activist, best known for her role in sparking the Montgomery bus boycott, 1955–56 (4,5)
- 12 An Austro-Asiatic family of languages, spoken by several million people in central and eastern India (5)
- 13 Leonidas, famed for his stand at Thermopylae (480 BC), was a king of this Greek warrior city-state (6)
- 15 British war artist known for his bitter, satirical painting *We Are Making a New World* (1918) (4,4)
- 17 The symbolic female figure of the French Republic (8)
- 19 The historic 1829 Manchester to Liverpool prize-winning locomotive (6)
- 22 Dynasty of northern and central India from the fourth to sixth centuries AD (5)
- 24 Queen consort (one spelling) of Clovis I, whom she converted to Christianity (and thus the French state also) (9)
- 26 The Dawes (or General ____) Act of 1887 provided for traditional common reservation land to be parcelled out to individual Native Americans (9)
- 27 A battle here in May and June 1918 proved to be the last major German attempt to win the First World War (5)
- 28 George ____, admiral whose mid-18th-century reforms of the British navy contributed to its success in the Seven Years' War (5)
- 29 ____ I, 15th-century king who did much to unite and raise the status of Hungary (8)



Down

- 1 20th-century historian JM ____, author of *The History of the World* and *The Triumph of the West* (7)
- 2 Celtic peoples whose lands were divided by Roman emperor Augustus into four parts (5)
- 3 She ruled Egypt (first with her father, then her two brothers, and then with her son) until her death in 30 BC (9)
- 4/5 Name applied to the sustained aerial bombardment of Iraq in early 1991 (6,5)
- 6 Flag dating back to the reign of James VI & I (when only two united countries were represented) (5,4)
- 7 The Bavarian town where the mysterious founding Kaspar Hauser died in 1833 (7)
- 8 Launched in 1962, it was the first satellite to relay TV pictures between US and Europe (7)
- 14 Name used to describe a fortified stronghold or citadel in ancient Greece (9)
- 16 A byname of Richard I, king of England (9)
- 17 Ancient city by the Sea of Galilee, possibly the birthplace of the woman who was the first witness of the Resurrection (7)
- 18 Jacques ____, Swiss-born French director of finances in the lead-up to the French Revolution (6)
- 20 Legendary Greek hero who killed the Minotaur (7)
- 21 Speaker's platform in the Roman Forum, decorated with the prows of captured ships (6)
- 23 Anne Brontë's pen name: ____ Bell (5)
- 25 Anglo-Jewish family of writer and broadcaster Marghanita and political scientist Harold (5)

Compiled by **Eddie James**

HOW TO ENTER

- Open to residents of the UK (& Channel Islands). Post entries to **BBC History Magazine, March 2024 Crossword, PO Box 501, Leicester, LE94 0AA** or email them to **March2024@historycomps.co.uk** by 5pm on 13 March 2024.
- Entrants must supply full name, address and phone number. The winners will be the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing time. Winners' names will appear in the May 2024 issue. By entering, participants agree to be bound by the terms and conditions shown in full in the box below. Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) will use personal details in accordance with the Immediate Privacy Policy at <https://policies.immediate.co.uk/privacy>
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Solution to our January 2024 crossword

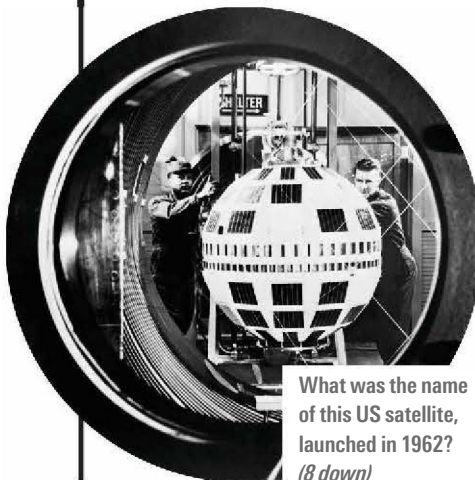
Across 1 Batista 5 Hever 9 Lisle 10 Parnassus 11 Guatemala 12 Drake 13 Austin 15 Boot Hill 18 Nicholas 19 Pounds 22 Roses 24 Chain mail 26 Elizabeth 27 Icen 28 Annie 29 Wallace
Down 1 Bologna 2 Tesla 3 Steve Biko 4 Appian 5 Hoard 6 Vespasian 7 Russell 8 Treason 14 Secession 16 Thornhill 17 Marches 18 Noriega 20 Saltire 21 Haw-Haw 23 Stake 25 Arena

Five winners of *A Travel Guide to the Middle Ages*:

Dorothy Reid, Broadstairs; Stephen Pegum, Barnet; Samantha Brown, Paisley; Angela Devitt, Scarborough; Stephen Cousins, Broadstairs

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What was the name of this US satellite, launched in 1962? (8 down)



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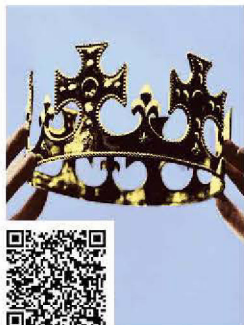
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NEXT MONTH

April issue on sale 14 March 2024

War beyond the trenches

Nick Lloyd argues that the eastern front was pivotal to the course of the First World War



A dangerous man to know

Charlotte May and Amy Wilcockson chart the eventful life of the Georgian poet Lord Byron



In her own words

Sarah Gristwood explains how reading women's diaries can offer a different perspective on past societies



Ancient Armageddon

Nicky Nielsen tells the dramatic story of the battle of Megiddo

MY HISTORY HERO

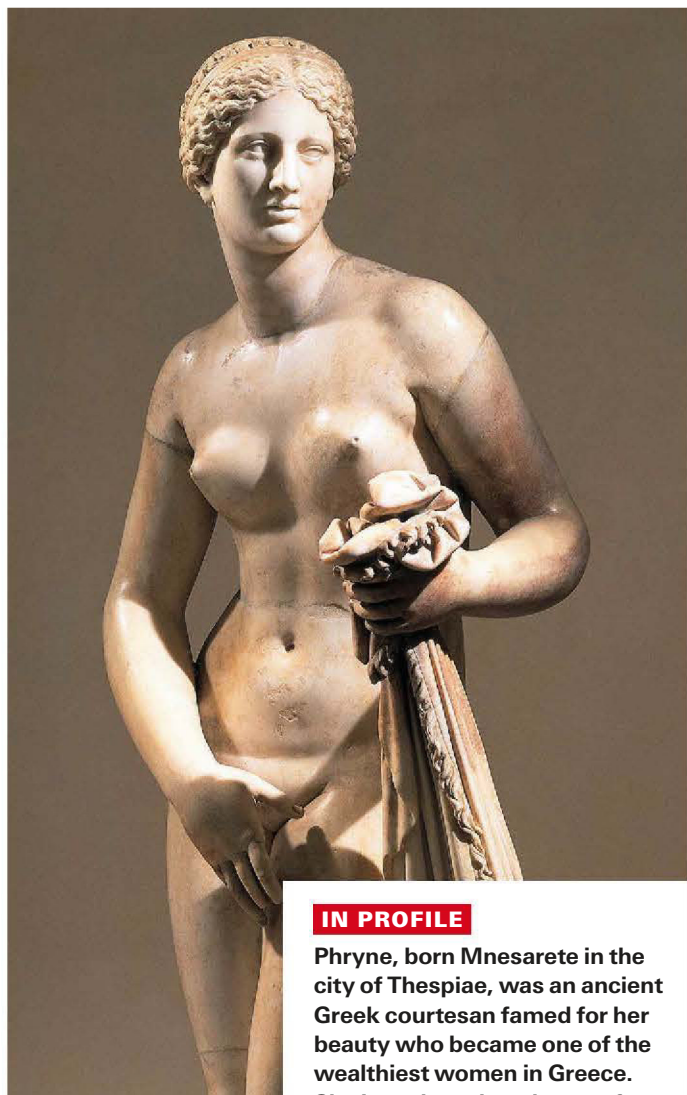
Writer and broadcaster Natalie Haynes chooses

Phryne

c371–316 BC



Natalie Haynes is a comedian, author, broadcaster and classicist. Her latest book is *Divine Might: Goddesses in Greek Myth* (Picador, 2023)



A Roman copy of Praxiteles' now-lost statue of Aphrodite, which was said to have been modelled on Phryne's likeness

IN PROFILE

Phryne, born Mnesarete in the city of Thespiae, was an ancient Greek courtesan famed for her beauty who became one of the wealthiest women in Greece. She is perhaps best known for offering to rebuild the walls of Thebes after their destruction by Alexander the Great, and for being the rumoured inspiration for Praxiteles' celebrated sculpture of Aphrodite

// As a woman living in a highly patriarchal society, Phryne had few options open to her: she had to use her beauty and wits to survive **//**

When did you first hear about Phryne? While I was a student at the University of Cambridge. The more I learned about her over the years, the more fascinated I became by her story. She was the 'It girl' of her day, and obviously a force of nature.

What kind of woman was she? It's hard to be entirely sure, because we have very little evidence for her life, but the polite term for her profession is 'courtesan' – a woman prepared to have sex with rich men without being married to them. Generations of subsequent courtesans used 'Phryne' as a sort of stage name, in tribute to her. But it's important to remember that, as a woman living in a highly patriarchal society, Phryne had few options open to her: she had to use her beauty and wits to survive.

Besides being smart, she was an avid art enthusiast and collector. She was more than capable of holding her own in high society, and was the mistress of reinvention.

What made Phryne a hero? She was clever, she was funny, she was canny and she was gorgeous – and her beautiful round face and straight nose, which are said to have served as the inspiration for Praxiteles' famous statue of Aphrodite [a Roman copy of the sculpture is pictured left], helped define the idea of beauty for centuries to come. Lots of witty sayings are attributed to her. For instance, upon meeting her at a dinner party, one male guest is alleged to have remarked: "I heard you were gorgeous!" Quick as a flash, she shot back: "And I heard you were mean!"

Phryne also made enough money to be able to offer to rebuild Thebes' city walls – on the condition that the words "Restored by Phryne the courtesan" were inscribed on them. She wanted public awareness of her generosity and wealth.

What was her finest hour? Her defence of herself at her trial for 'impiety' – most likely brought because she had modelled for the statue of a goddess. She hired a lawyer to defend her, but he did a terrible job – and she could have been put to death if she'd been found guilty. So she made a final appeal to the jury, which took great courage, and they let her off. Later male writers spiced up the tale, claiming that she stripped naked in the courtroom – and that it was the sight of her bare breasts that won over the jury – but the odds are that that never happened.

Can you see any parallels between Phryne's life and your own? I think we would have got on well because of our shared sense of humour. But that's where any parallels end – I'd have made the least effective 'It girl' in ancient Greece! **H**

Natalie Haynes was talking to York Membery



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